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The Bank Robbers

By
Arthur Griffiths

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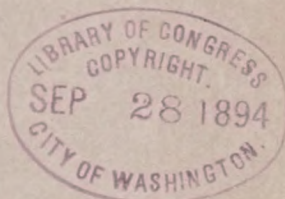
THE BANK ROBBERS;

OR,

FAST AND LOOSE.

BY

George Fredericks
ARTHUR GRIFFITHS.



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FAST AND LOOSE.

CHAPTER 1.

A BANK ROBBERY.

THERE was something wrong, very wrong, at Waldo's Bank; or, more exactly, at Messrs. Candelent, Dandy, and Waldo's, the full title of the firm generally known by the name of its junior and most prominent partner.

The day's work had opened as usual. Precisely as the clock struck nine Mr. Waldo had crossed the threshold, as his habit had been for the last forty years. He was always the first to reach, often the last to leave, the bank. The rest of the clerks and *employés* had followed close upon Mr. Waldo's heels. Only the chief cashier, Mr. Surtees, had been a little behindhand that morning, but this was nothing unusual either.

The chief cashier was a little remiss on the score of punctuality. The offense, though serious, Mr. Waldo forgave him; for they had been clerks together, and were still good friends. Among the subordinates the matter was almost a joke; except, indeed, with Percy Meggitt, the assistant-cashier, who sneered and wondered why the firm was so easy with the old fool. But then it was well known at the bank that Meggitt was an ambitious junior, who already counted upon stepping into his senior's shoes.

The day's business, as I have said, began as usual. The clerks on arrival changed their coats and went to their ledgers. Mr. Meggitt and others stood at the counter. Mr. Surtees was in the little glazed chamber, his own private sanctum, which was partitioned off one corner of the great central room. Close by this was the passage into the partners' parlor, which Mr. Waldo occupied in state and alone.

At the other end of the bank-parlor was a red-baize-covered door leading into the strong-room of the bank. Inside the baize door

was a second of iron, heavily bound and clamped with a great lock of most elaborate workmanship, a masterpiece of the most celebrated safe-makers in the world.

Half an hour after the arrival of Mr. Surtees Mr. Waldo rang for him. The cashier, who was really waiting for the summons, obeyed it with alacrity. It was account day, and there were securities to be handed over to the various brokers and banks—work which the head of the firm did himself, with the assistance of the cashier. It was not a long job, and was generally finished within half an hour.

To-day, however, the clerks and porters, whose duty it was to carry these securities round to their several destinations, were kept waiting quite an hour. No one understood the delay. It was known that the settling was not a heavy one. Why were Mr. Waldo and Mr. Surtees so long over it?

Then the cashier came out with his face as white as a sheet, walked with faltering step into his glass box, and then—it was plainly visible through the transparent partition—buried his head in his hands.

Something wrong indeed! The next move was from Mr. Waldo, who called in Percy Meggitt, the assistant-cashier.

“The day is getting on,” said the banker. “Have these sent round at once, Mr. Meggitt.”

“Are they complete, sir? Perhaps I had better run over the list with Mr. Surtees to make sure.”

“It is not necessary,” replied Mr. Waldo; “I have just done so with Mr. Surtees myself.”

“Very good, sir. If they’re all right—”

“Yes, yes; they’re all right. That will do. No, by the way how stupid of me! There is a parcel of Portuguese, £9000 worth, which I have retained. They were for Limming and Cornecup. As you pass, just beg Mr. Limming to step round here—and—and—send Hoskins to me.”

Meggitt bowed and left the parlor, his hands full of papers, and his manner of importance. This work of distributing the securities was usually Mr. Surtees’s, but the cashier that day was evidently not equal to the occasion.

Hoskins, who went into the parlor next, was the senior porter, an old soldier, as stanch a servant to the firm as he had been to the Queen. They would have trusted him with untold gold at Waldo’s; above all, he could be trusted to hold his tongue.

“Take this telegram at once to the central office, Hoskins,”

said his employer; "and then this letter to Scotland Yard. Not a word in the office, mind, about either of these messages."

"Right, sir," said Hoskins, briefly; and, with the military salute he would have given a field-marshal, the old porter withdrew.

The telegram was addressed to Mr. Onesimus Dandy, the senior partner, who lived at Wimbledon, and who seldom, if ever, came to town—except when called upon to advise as to the large operations of the bank, in which his great experience and keen financial insight made him an invaluable authority. Mr. Dandy left the whole control and management to Mr. Waldo. But the senior partner was wanted this morning.

"Your presence urgently required," so ran the message. "Securities missing from strong room. Very mysterious affair. Have sent for the police."

The letter conveyed by Hoskins to the authorities at Scotland Yard was, in effect, a request that one of their practiced and astute detectives might be placed at the disposal of the bank. There was a strong suspicion that a felony had been perpetrated, and Messrs. Candulent, Dandy, and Waldo wished to claim the aid of the law.

Meanwhile, Mr. Surtees remained closeted in his little chamber. Mr. Waldo came and went from his parlor into the bank, and from the bank back into his parlor, but spoke to no one. The vague feeling of uneasiness gained ground. There was thunder in the air, trouble impending, and no one knew upon whom the blow might fall. The clerks wondered and whispered, but still nothing transpired.

Curiosity was not much assuaged by the first visitor who went into Mr. Waldo's room. This was Mr. Limming, of that eminent firm of stockbrokers, Limming and Cornecup, who constantly called. They did a good deal of business with the bank, and came for orders nearly every day.

"I was on the point of looking in," said Mr. Limming, gayly, "when I got your message. Things are pretty lively; Mexicans on the shoot—whether up or down I can not say for certain; but there is money to be made or lost, and plenty of it in that line within the next few weeks. Well, what can we do for you, Mr. Waldo?"

"Not much, not much," replied the banker, rather hurriedly. "It is only a small matter of business. You sold, I think, £9000 worth of Portuguese a short time ago for a client of ours?"

Mr. Limming referred to his pocket-book.

"Yes; quite so; and the securities are to be handed over to-day,"

"Exactly," replied Mr. Waldo. "Well, the fact is—" he stutted and stammered rather, and had some difficulty in getting out what he wanted to say—"the fact is, a very odd circumstance has occurred—something quite extraordinary and new in my experience: these Portuguese bonds have been mislaid."

"Mislaid! They made a bulky parcel; securities are not so easily lost."

"I did not say they were lost; I said mislaid. Why I sent for you was to ask you —"

"To carry over to another account? By all means."

"Of course at our risk," said Mr. Waldo.

"Naturally," said Mr. Limming; "anything else?"

Mr. Waldo turned over the papers in his desk, and selected one which he handed to Mr. Limming. "Kindly make those investments in the usual way. I think that will be all—no, by the way," and he laid his hand on Mr. Limming's arm just as he was leaving the room—"we should be obliged to you if you will say nothing whatever about the missing Portuguese bonds. It seems so careless to have mislaid them, and it might do the bank harm if it got about."

"Mum's the word," said Mr. Limming, putting his finger to the side of his nose.

And with that the rather self-satisfied, swaggering sort of gentleman, affecting white waistcoats and very bright ties, sauntered out of the office.

If Mr. Limming's visit did little to satisfy the curiosity of the clerks, the next arrival tended to increase rather than allay the excitement. No one knew him by sight. He sent in no card, and from the deference with which Hoskins ushered him into Mr. Waldo's room it was clear that he was a personage of some importance. There was something very peculiar in his look too; a soft, stealthy air, as of a cat about to make a spring. There was a feline glitter in his bluish-green eyes; and his gray mustachios, brushed out straight, might have belonged to a veteran mouser accustomed to pounce promptly on its prey.

It was no other than Mr. Faske, officially known as Inspector Faske, of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard.

On entering the bank-parlor Mr. Faske removed his hat, which, by the way, he always carried very loosely on his head, so that it rocked from side to side as he walked, and produced his card.

"Oh, yes, to be sure. Mr. Faske from Scotland Yard," said

Mr. Waldo, nervously; "I am glad they sent you, as I believe you have had particular experience in these affairs."

"Might I presume to ask what affairs?" said Mr. Faske, showing his white teeth, and looking, with his bushy white eyebrows and straight mustachios, more than ever like a cat.

"Of course. I forget. You know nothing whatever of the circumstances of the case. I had better, perhaps, tell you exactly what has occurred."

"Undoubtedly, if you wish for my assistance," replied the other.

"Well, it is not a long story, only I hardly know where to begin."

"Begin in the middle," said Faske, abruptly. "What has happened?"

"We have lost a large number of securities, Portuguese, from the strong-room of the bank."

"Stolen?"

"That is for you to say. To me it is quite incomprehensible."

"You have the numbers, of course?"

"Certainly. Here is the security book. Will you examine it?"

"No; but I will take down the numbers if you will read them out to me. It is most important."

The detective carefully noted these particulars, then went on:

"And you are certain they were in the strong-room?"

"I saw them there myself three days ago; they made a bulky parcel. They were in twenty-pound bonds, and there were four hundred and fifty of them. They attracted my attention when I last went into the strong-room with Mr. Surtees."

"Mr. Surtees?"

"Yes; our chief cashier. He and I alone have access to the strong-room."

"Each of you has your own key?"

"Yes, and they are always in our own possession—at least, I can answer for mine," and Mr. Waldo pointed to his watch-chain; "and I have every reason to believe that Mr. Surtees is equally careful of his."

For some little time Mr. Faske made no remark, but sat there nursing his leg, and apparently closely examining the knot with which his right shoe-string was tied.

"Lock been tampered with?" he said suddenly, but with a gentle voice, as if asking the question of himself.

"Not the slightest signs of it, so far as I can see."

"Perhaps I had better see for myself. Can we get to the strong-room without attracting attention?"

"It is there," said Mr. Waldo, pointing to the red-baize door at the end of the room.

Mr. Faske, without another word, got up, went straight to the baize door, opened it, struck a lucifer-match on his boot, and held it close to the lock of the heavy iron door within.

"Ah! one of Stubbs's patents; nothing like them, they are the safest in the world. Never knew any one but 'Velvet Ned' who was a match for a patent Stubbs. But this one has not been tampered with, that is clear. Have you your key, sir?"

Mr. Waldo removed his key from his watch-chain, and handed it to the detective, who immediately unlocked the door.

"As I thought. It works all right; there has been no foul play with the lock." Then he relocked the door, returned the key, and went back to his seat in the parlor.

A fresh pause and a still closer examination of the shoe-string. Then, quite suddenly, as before, Mr. Faske asked: "And this Mr. Surtees?"

"One of the oldest—in fact the oldest and most trusted of our *employés*. He has been in the service of the bank these thirty years; indeed, we were clerks together. I can not bring myself to suspect him."

"H'm, h'm. Is he here? May I see him?"

"Of course; but perhaps it would be as well to wait until Mr. Dandy arrives. He is our senior partner; I telegraphed for him the moment I missed the bonds."

"Quite so, quite so. We will wait for Mr. Dandy," and with that Mr. Faske returned to his all-absorbing occupation with his right leg and shoe.

Half an hour more elapsed, and then Mr. Dandy arrived.

A slim, well-made little man, with rather a stoop in the shoulders, and a shuffling walk indicative of advancing years. He was extremely neat and natty in his appearance, more like an old beau from the West End than a magnate of the financial world.

Directly he entered the parlor Mr. Waldo rose; he had been a clerk when Mr. Dandy was a partner, and the old feeling of respect for his superior clung to him to the last. Mr. Faske also got up from his chair, and, after the partners had shaken hands, he was formally introduced.

"Well, Waldo, what is all this? Thieves in the bank—hey? what—what does it all mean?"

Mr. Dandy spoke in the feeble, chirpy voice of a very old man. But there was much keenness left in the dark and piercing eyes, one glance at which, and at the somewhat prominent nose, ought to have warned intelligent persons not to expect to get the better of Mr. Dandy in a bargain or in anything else.

Mr. Waldo told his partner the story in much the same words as he had used to Mr. Faske.

Mr. Dandy listened attentively, then turned abruptly to the detective, and said: "And what do you think of all this, Mr. Faske?"

"I never say what I think, sir—at least, not till I am sure."

"And are you sure of nothing in this?"

"I am sure it is a put-up job," said Mr. Faske, decisively; "you know what that means? No? Well, done in the house by some one who knows every move. Don't you see how cleverly it's all planned! These bonds—specially selected, payable to bearer, no transfer necessary. Sharp that, eh? Yes, sir, the culprit is some one behind your counter."

"Ridiculous! You don't mean to accuse Mr. Waldo?" said Mr. Dandy, laughing; "or"—this said with some hesitation—"or Mr. Surtees?"

"Mr. Waldo would hardly steal his own property," replied the detective with a smile; "that goes far to exonerate him. As to the other—well, the thing is suspicious, and that is the least I can say."

"But it is preposterous," broke in Mr. Waldo. "I can not bring myself to think ill of Mr. Surtees. Besides, he may be able to explain—perhaps he was careless with his key; it may have got into wrong hands; the bank may have been broken into in the night, and the securities removed."

"Any signs of a burglary lately in the bank? No! Any cash taken? There was cash in the strong-room, so you said, I think—nothing touched, only the bonds, which are payable to bearer! There was no common thief in this, you may be sure."

"Well, but what does Mr. Surtees himself say?" interposed Mr. Dandy, quite as much disinclined to think evil of his cashier as Mr. Waldo; "let's have him in."

"Yes, I should like to ask him a few questions," said the detective, once more nursing his leg.

A minute or two later Mr. Surtees entered the bank-parlor. His face was white and haggard; his eyes restless; in spite of his

endeavors to keep quiet his fingers twitched nervously, and it must be confessed that his manner was altogether against him.

"Sit down, Mr. Surtees," said Mr. Dandy, not unkindly. "After what has happened you must not be surprised if we ask you a few questions; I am sure we can depend upon you to answer them in a straightforward fashion." Then, with a move of his hand toward Mr. Faske, the senior partner left the detective to continue the examination.

"Of course, you must understand," began Mr. Faske, majestically, "that you need not answer any question of mine unless you like."

Mr. Surtees bowed.

"You have the custody of the key of the strong-room?"

"Yes; jointly with Mr. Waldo, who has a duplicate key."

"When were you there last—I mean previously to this morning?"

"The day before yesterday I unlocked the strong-room door to deposit some title-deeds and other property belonging to a customer of the bank."

"Was everything all right?"

"So far as I could see, yes; but I was not in the room for more than five minutes, and hadn't time to examine or look about me."

"Where do you keep your key of the strong-room lock?"

"On my key-bunch."

"A loose key-bunch?"

"No, it is fastened by a chain to one of my braces."

"Are your keys always in your own possession?"

"Invariably."

"At night?"

"I place them under my pillow with my watch."

"Do you think it possible that your keys, or more particularly the strong-room key, could have fallen into any other hands during the last few days or weeks?"

"It is absolutely impossible; none of my keys—certainly not the strong-room key—have been out of my possession."

Mr. Faske looked across the table at the partners in a meaning way; and both seemed to understand the glance, which was intelligible also to poor Mr. Surtees.

"I know it is all the more against me, but I must tell the truth. The key has never been out of my possession. I feel perfectly sure of that."

There was a long pause, which Mr. Dandy at length broke.

"This is exceedingly painful, and I hardly know what to say. I am loath to accuse you, Surtees; you have served us so long and faithfully."

"I am innocent, I swear before God I am innocent. I know nothing whatever of those bonds."

"We are only too anxious to believe that, and you may rely upon our doing nothing which is hasty or unnecessarily harsh. It is impossible, however, to conceal the fact that you are under suspicion. Please God it may be removed. It is possible that within the next few days some fresh light may be thrown upon this mysterious affair. Meantime everything shall go on as usual. You shall retain your position—you see we have not lost confidence in you even now; all I insist upon is that you shall surrender that key."

So spoke Mr. Dandy, with something of the old masterful manner which was once so well known in the bank. He received the strong-room key from Mr. Surtees, and placed it on his own bunch.

"For the present, we two partners," he said to Mr. Waldo, "will be responsible for our own securities and cash. That will do, Mr. Surtees." And the unfortunate cashier with a few muttered words left the room.

"What is to be done next?" asked Mr. Waldo, rather helplessly.

"I will tell you," put in Mr. Faske; "that is to say, if you mean to intrust me with the affair. We must keep a close watch on this Surtees, and find out all about him, both before and since the loss of the bonds. Do you happen to know his private address?"

"No. 27, The Mall, Chiswick. That is where Mr. Surtees lives. Anything else you want to know?"

Mr. Faske had taken out his note-book, in which he entered methodically the various facts connected with Mr. Surtees private life, viz., that he had been in the employment of the bank for twenty-eight years, that his age was fifty-three; that he was a widower and had two children, both grown up—one a daughter, the other a son, who was at that time an officer in the 119th Regiment, stationed at Aldershot.

"That will do for the present," said Mr. Faske. "You shall hear again from me, gentlemen, before long." Then the detective withdrew, leaving the two partners to go all over the case, a dozen times, point by point, from the beginning to the end.

CHAPTER II.

MR. SURTEES AND HIS SON.

THE house Mr. Surtees occupied at Chiswick was one of those old-fashioned places that lie within a few hundred yards of Hammersmith Bridge, facing the river, with gardens both around the house and opposite it on the other side of the road, where steps led to the boat-house at the water-side. Mr. Surtees was a widower. His wife had died when both his children—Josephine and her brother Robert—were quite young. The old house—it was his own, bought with the small fortune his bride had brought him—was terribly lonely to him without the bright presence of the woman who had cast in her lot with his; but he had stayed on in it bravely and hopefully, preferring to bear his present pain rather than lose the sweet memories it must always preserve to him. As time passed he was thankful that he had decided to stay at Riverside Lodge. His love of the house grew upon him. His daughter, as her beauty developed with her years, resembled her mother more and more, to the immense comfort and joy of her father.

It was a very quiet, retired life they led. Mr. Surtees, like a thousand other business men, went up daily to his desk, returning regularly at even-tide thankfully and eagerly to enjoy the peaceful pleasures of his tranquil home. They kept very much to themselves. Josephine had girl-friends among her immediate neighbors, but during the day she busied herself with her books or her household affairs, and in the evening devoted herself entirely to her father. Then at times there was Bob, much-loved, much-spoiled brother Bob, to bear her company; now at home from school, then on leave from his regiment, but always, while he was in the house, his sister's shadow. They could not bear to be apart, and not the least of the blessings for which Mr. Surtees felt thankful was the warm, deep-seated affection which bound his two children to one another and to him. A father might well be proud of such a pair.

Bob was a big, handsome young fellow, gay, light-hearted, and careless, somewhat given to extravagance and a little too easily led by others. He had all the happy-go-lucky recklessness customary in the British subaltern; was full of fun and "go," good at all

games, ready at a moment's notice to dance or fight, to join in any amusement, or take his share of hard knocks.

As for Josephine, she was a perfect type of an English girl; fresh, healthy, straight-limbed, in the first bloom of budding womanhood. She carried her head high, and looked fearlessly at you with her bright eyes, challenging respectful admiration for her beautiful face, with its clear wholesome complexion and fine, rich color. Her hair was dark—almost black, her eyes a deep violet. Although tall, she was exquisitely proportioned; her small hands, like her clear-cut upper lip and slight nostrils, betokened race and breeding, while her voice, capable of the most varied modulations, now soft and tender, now deep yet mellow in tone, was of the fiber to stir a man to his inmost heart.

Mr. Surtees, returning to his home on the evening of the loss at the bank, downcast and dejected, could have readily obtained sweet sympathy from Josephine had he told her all. But how could the father bring himself to break it to his daughter that his employers thought him a thief?

"You are not well, dear father?" said Josephine at once, as she noted his clouded brow and miserable mien.

"A little overtired, my child—nothing more; it has been a heavy day at the bank. Any one been here to-day?"

"Only one persons—guess," cried Josephine, with radiant eyes.

"I give it up, dear," replied the father, wearily. "You must tell me. I haven't energy enough even to guess."

"Why, you dear, stupid old father; you might have guessed, I'm sure. Who else would it be but—Bob?"

"Bob!" said the father, in a tone which did not indicate the liveliest satisfaction. "Bob in town—again?"

"He only came up to dine and sleep; and there is a party, you know, at the Waldos', which, of course, he did not care to miss."

"Where is he now?" asked Mr. Surtees, abruptly.

"He went out on the river for an hour or so, but he will be back in plenty of time. Are you going to look for him? Shall I go, too?"

For the first time almost in her young life her father broke away from her and spoke less gently than was his wont.

"No, no—I must speak to him—alone and at once."

With that Mr. Surtees passed into the hall and out across the Mall to where the steps led down to the river.

He had not long to wait for his son, who was even then bringing his boat alongside.

"Why, father! would you like a turn on the water? Jump in; I'll take you as far as the church."

"Mr. Surtees shook his head, and said, rather sternly,

"No, Bob, come on shore; I want to speak to you."

Bob Surtees chained up his boat, and sprung lightly up the steps. A fine athletic figure he looked in his white flannels; and at any other time the sight would have gladdened his father's heart.

"Now, Bob, listen to me. This is not doing as you promised, or as I wished. How is it you are here again within three days—well, four days—of your last visit home?"

Bob hung his head.

"There was nothing doing in camp, father, and you know I have a season-ticket."

"Why should you, a poor man's son, have a season-ticket at all?" interrupted his father, angrily. "Running backward and forward to London when you should be with your regiment is mere idle pleasure-seeking. It's all of a piece. Wasteful, wicked extravagance, Robert, and it must come to an end."

Bob still tried to justify himself. "There is a party at the Waldos' to-night, and you know you always wished me to accept their invitations, father. It is the dress-rehearsal of their theatricals."

"In which you are to take a part with Miss Helena Waldo, I presume? There must be an end of this ridiculous nonsense, Robert. You don't suppose for one moment that Mr. and Mrs. Waldo would allow you to pay your attentions to a daughter of theirs?"

"Why not, father?" asked Bob, simply, but with a heightened color. "We are gentlefolk, while they—"

"It is idle to discuss this, Robert. A match between you and Helena Waldo is out of the question. You have not a sufficient income; your profession is a poor one. Besides—"

The wretched man thought of what had happened that very day at the bank. What! his son, the son of an *employé* under a disgraceful accusation, to aspire to the hand of a partner's daughter!

"But this is mere waste of words, Robert. What I wanted to say to you, once and for all, is, that you must mend your ways. It would be better almost if you left England; exchanged—say to India."

"What would Josephine say?"

As yet brother and sister had never been parted for long.

"I know her strong affection for you. As for yours, I am not so sure."

"Father!"

"I am sorry to be so harsh, Robert, but I must doubt affection which comes second after self. You little think, I fear, where all this money you have had from me, especially that large sum within the last few days to pay your gambling debts, comes from. Have you thought that it is stolen?"—he shuddered as he spoke the word, and added—"stolen from Josephine's portion; that it diminishes by so many hundreds the sum I was putting by for her on her marriage, or when I am gone?"

"I know it, father, and bitterly do I repent my foolishness, my recklessness. How shall I prove that I am in earnest?"

"By being more circumspect in the future. You have laid a heavy burden on me, Robert, a heavy burden, and I am nearly crushed by the weight."

With these words Mr. Surtees turned to re-enter the house. The day was waning, the red sun sinking behind the belt of trees, from amongst which rose the old tower of Chiswick Church. But there was light enough to see up and down the Mall, and as Mr. Surtees crossed it he recognized a figure slowly sauntering up the road.

It was Mr. Faske, in the same attire he had worn at the bank that day, with his tall hat poised loosely on his head and his hands in his pockets.

"They have lost no time," said Mr. Surtees to himself, as he went in. "I suppose I shall have that man always at my heels now."

To understand more clearly the reproaches Mr. Surtees addressed to his son, we must go back a little to a date slightly antecedent to the loss at the bank.

Field-sports and theatricals filled up so large a portion of his spare time that Robert Surtees had a wide circle of acquaintances, even beyond his comrades in the regiment and at Aldershot.

Among others, Mr. Percy Meggitt, the assistant-cashier at the bank, was very fond of young Surtees.

A word here as to the assistant-cashier. Percy Meggitt had been brought into the bank by old Mr. Dandy, who, for reasons of his own, took a great interest in the young clerk. It was through the senior partner's good offices that Meggitt rose rapidly in the bank, and became, before he was five-and-thirty, assistant-cashier. At the time we make his acquaintance he already showed signs of de-

generation. His yellowish red hair, parted in the middle, was very thin on the top of his head, and his figure had lost its symmetry. He was a little too fond of a good dinner and a good glass of wine, and was suffering thus prematurely from his self-indulgence.

Meggitt was not popular at the bank. Since his advancement he had given himself great airs. None of the other *employés* knew him at all intimately now. Vague rumors circulated at the bank, set in motion by Meggitt himself, of the splendor of his chambers in the West End, of the entertainments he gave, and to which he was invited. How he could keep up such a show and lead such a life on his modest salary was a mystery which no one seemed anxious to solve. It was, however, supposed that he possessed good private means, an idea strengthened by the estimation in which he was held by the heads of the firm.

He was noted for hospitality of a florid kind, and the dinners he gave at his club, the Junior Belgrave, were the admiration of the rest of the club. It was a club of the doubtful debatable kind, hanging to the skirts of Clubland, but with no very assured reputation. Its members were rather a mixed lot. They eyed each other suspiciously or with surprise, as though mentally inquiring, "How on earth did you get in here?" Most of them, too, were cautious enough not to play billiards, or sit down at the card-tables, except with their own personal friends, whom they invited to the club.

But things were done well at the Junior Belgrave. It was a smart, showy house, well mounted, full of gorgeous upholstery, and—at least upon the surface—well managed. There were plenty of servants, in and out of livery, who did the service well, except that their manners were a little too familiar; whilst the head servants patronized the members, and probably lent them money on the sly.

Mr. Meggitt was a prominent personage at the Junior Belgrave, and when he entertained his friends the whole establishment was on the alert to give him satisfaction. One night, a few weeks before the occurrences related in the previous chapter, Mr. Meggitt gave a small dinner to a select party. Our friend Bob Surtees was one; Captain Wingspur, Mrs. Waldo's son by her first marriage, was another; and the fourth was a distinguished foreigner on a visit to England, who had brought introductions to Waldo's bank.

Captain Wingspur was a person of considerable importance in his own, and indeed in many other persons' estimation. Heir-presumptive to an Irish peerage, with a rich step-father, who made him a handsome allowance; toadied and flattered by at least half

the people he met; it was natural he should have a good opinion of himself.

Small people are often eaten up with conceit, and Captain Wingspur was no exception to the rule. He thought himself the *beau idéal* of a light cavalry officer, and no doubt his shriveled legs were admirably suited to look well in boots and breeches; while his head, disproportionately big for his inches, took a very large-sized helmet, and gave him a particularly martial air when at the head of his troop. His mental capacity, however, was somewhat limited; his mind, such as it was, concentrated on the cut of his clothes, and he had no great conversational powers.

Mr. Meggitt's third guest was altogether a different person; he was introduced by the host as Marquis de Ojo Verde, a rich Cuban. The marquis was a remarkable-looking man in his way, with a face that impressed not too pleasantly at the very first glance. Two tints predominated, black and red, both almost startling in their intensity. The black was his smooth shining hair and mustachios—so black that they might have been dyed; the red, a complexion so high-colored as to be suggestive of rouge. His eyes, defiant when they chose to meet other eyes, were large, fierce, and dark; the mouth hard, and habitually close-shut under its heavy sable fringe; the jaw broad and heavy, indicating much strength of purpose. In person he was considerably above the middle height and powerfully built, but with a slight stoop in his shoulders, while, as he walked, a close observer might have noticed the very faintest hang or limp in the left leg.

He was well-dressed, but with some pretension; a very open white waistcoat, a broad stripe down his trousers, an enormous solitaire stud of rubies round a black diamond, a big black tie, a velvet collar to his coat, and diamond buckles on his natty shoes. He only wanted a star and a ribbon—no doubt he had them both at home—to be a perfect model of a foreign diplomatist or ambassador from some South American Court—together a thorough man of the world, at home everywhere, speaking many languages, English among them, without strange accent or hesitation.

The dinner was excellent. Clear turtle was followed by salmon and white-bait; next came a *suprême de volaille*, with truffles and *chaud froid* of *foie gras*, then quail in olive-leaves, and plovers' eggs.

"They do you well," said the marquis, "right well, at your club, *mon cher* Meggitt. A most excellent club. I envy you."

"Would you like me to put your name down, marquis?"

"Enormously! How long does it take to get in?"

"Oh, not very long," replied Meggitt, vaguely. He did not like to confess that a personal interview with the secretary would probably settle the business out of hand.

"Took me nine years to get into the Flag," said Captain Wingspur.

"We're not so long-winded at the Mars and Neptune; about three's enough," remarked Surtees, pleasantly.

"Don't call the Mars a club," replied the other; "not a military club. The Flag's the only decent military club in town."

"The Mars is good enough for me," said Bob, good-humoredly. "You play too high at the Flag."

"Ah, indeed!" The marquis seemed interested. "What do you play? Baccarat?"

"No; whist."

"A fine game," said Meggitt, "for those who can play. I can't; at least only badly at best."

"I much prefer *écarté*," said Surtees. "It's shorter; there's more snap in it."

"Played by only two persons, I believe?" said the Marquis de Ojo Verde, as though he had never seen the game.

"Don't you know it?" asks Wingspur. "I thought everybody knew *écarté*."

"I shall be very happy to take a lesson from you in it," replied the Cuban, without a smile; "and I will teach you some of the American games, if you like—'poker,' 'euchre,' or 'poor Joe,' or 'skin 'em alive.' I've learned them in their own homes."

"You've been pretty well all over the world, marquis," put in Meggitt, as though to change the conversation.

"It's my fate; I am a cosmopolitan. I belong to the whole world. The whole world claims me; now here, now there. Cuba, South America, the Sandwich Islands, Japan, then Europe or the Cape of Good Hope, for a change. My ancestors were travelers, and they left me as a legacy their wandering spirit."

"And their possessions?" said Meggitt, speaking like a sycophant.

"Alas! yes; and more trouble, many of them, than they are worth. Castles in Spain—literally, gentlemen, real castles. I know your English idiom, but I have one in Andalusia, near Moron; another not far from Cuenca, and a house in Madrid. Outgoings, all outgoings—nothing but expense to maintain."

"You have property in Italy, too?" went on Meggitt, trying to bring his foreign guest out.

"Nothing much—a large tract which includes a half-dry lake. No value; only expense at present. Ah! if that were only drained and cultivated, what wealth—what a fortune it would be worth! But it is like my island in the West Indies. Virgin soil lying fallow, waiting only to be planted; palm-trees, canes, cacao, cotton—everything would grow."

"You want some of our English capital," said Bob Surtees.

The marquis bowed gravely, but there was a fierce hawk-like gleam in his eyes as he said, "It is not so easy to get some of your English capital. Yet I could pay back cent. per cent. and more, on every farthing advanced. But there—enough of my own affairs."

After dinner came a magnum of Latour, then coffee, cigars, liquors; and the feast was at an end. What next? The night was still young. No one wanted to turn in yet. Where should they go? What should they do to kill the next few hours?

It was Captain Wingspur who proposed a rubber of whist. Bob Surtees seconded the notion heartily. He was proud of his play, and was not sorry to show off before Wingspur. Our friend Bob wanted to prove that one of the 119th was quite as good a man as any light dragoon.

So when Wingspur proposed pound points, with a fiver on the rub, saying, loftily, that he never played for less, Surtees for one promptly agreed. He could no more afford to play such points than he could to drive a four-in-hand and live in Grosvenor Square, but he was not to be beaten by Horace Wingspur in the game of brag.

The Marquis de Ojo Verde shrugged his shoulders when asked to play. He knew little of whist, but he would join to make up the table. Meggitt agreed, but reluctantly, and presently they were seated in the card-room, which, strange to say, they had to themselves. When they rose from the whist-table, Surtees had lost a couple of hundred pounds to Captain Wingspur.

The marquis now talked of going home.

"How about your lesson in *écarté*?" asked Wingspur.

Half a dozen games were played, and ended in the transfer of a few sovereigns from the marquis to the light dragoon, who then rose, saying it was late.

"I'm not very strong, as you see," replied his antagonist; "but it is a pretty game, and I should like to play more, just a little more. What say you, Mr. Surtees—if Captain Wingspur must go,

will you take your chance of retrieving your bad luck on me?" And as the marquis held out the pack his face might have been that of an innocent sheep offering itself to be shorn.

Some devil tempted Surtees to accept the offer. His losses had hit him harder than he cared to own. Here, perhaps, was a chance of setting himself right. So he sat down, and for a time it was all on his side. He won game after game, and soon his account rose to nearly a hundred and fifty pounds.

"Shall we stop now?" asked the marquis, politely, as he leisurely drank a glass of iced water, a proposal which Meggitt warmly seconded.

Bob, who had just finished his third brandy and soda, and was a little flushed, no doubt with his triumph, would not hear of stopping.

"We'll play all night, if you like."

Fresh cards were cut, and the game went on. Presently somehow the luck changed. Surtees began to hold miserable cards; he played a little too boldly, not to say wildly, while the marquis grew more and more cool.

"You have been teaching me to some purpose, Mr. Surtees. No cards, thank you; I mark and play the king."

Surtees could make no headway at all. The other was completely in the vein; he held all the cards. His play, which had been always sure, became more and more skillful, till it ended—when Meggitt insisted at last in putting an end to the play—in the Cuban rising a winner of seven hundred pounds.

"I will give you my I O U," said poor Bob, rather ruefully, and it was the redemption of this and the other gambling debt to Captain Wingspur that had elicited Mr. Surtees's bitter reproaches.

CHAPTER III.

THE WALDOS.

THE Waldos, the family of which Mr. Samuel Waldo, banker, was the nominal head, were by way of being very great people. They had a house in Carlton Gardens, and made a great show. Mrs. Waldo aspired to be a leader of fashion, in which questionable ambition she was aided by three smart "rather rapid" daughters, and the son, by a first marriage, Captain Wingspur, to whom we have been already introduced. They kept open house in Carlton Gardens during the season, gave balls, dinners, and theatrical

entertainments. When the summer was at its height Mrs. Waldo had her day at the Rookery, Kew, and her garden-parties were highly esteemed with a certain set. There was no smarter carriage in the Park than Mrs. Waldo's; no toilets so brilliant or so varied as those in which mother and daughters appeared in public places, at Sandown, Lords, Goodwood, or Ryde. Quiet folk were continually hearing about the Waldos. Court and other journals—often at so much per line—chronicled all their doings, their comings and goings, their guests, and the clothes they wore. The Waldos turned up everywhere. That steam-launch on the river, dashing recklessly among the outriggers, and driving the fishermen in their punts nearly mad? The Waldos. That big barge at Henlêy Regatta, full of gorgeous beings, rainbow-hued, and noisy as parrots? The Waldos. That box at the theater, the royal box, or next to it, the occupants of which kept up a constant chatter, to the annoyance of the audience and discomfiture of the actors? The Waldos. That select party which sought to monopolize half the train between Calais and Cannes? The Waldos. At home or abroad, on shore or afloat, in coach or carriage, in their own or other people's yachts, in the park, at Hurlingham, Lillie Bridge, at the Opera, or a fancy fair in the Albert Hall; always *en evidence*, loud, pushing, off-handed, rude, wherever people congregated, and it was the right place to go, there the Waldos were certain to be seen.

It had not been always thus, however. Time was when the Waldos were at the very foot of the social ladder. Thirty years previously Mr. Waldo had been a simple clerk in the bank; Mrs. Waldo, a young widow, with bright, bold eyes, which she had used with considerable effect upon Mr. Dandy, one of the partners. She was the widow of a silly youth of good family, one of the Wingspurs, whose marriage had caused a certain scandal at the time. Young Wingspur had died conveniently soon, leaving his wife a small fortune, and a banking account in Mincing Lane. It was in this way that she came to know Mr. Dandy. She had played her cards to win him, and had failed. Then she came to think more tolerantly of little Waldo.

"He'd just do for you," Mr. Dandy had said with a mocking smile. "Steady, industrious—one of our most promising young people. Intensely respectable, moreover, and without an idea or an opinion of his own. And I never saw a man so smitten. He'd just do for you, I repeat."

Why not? The man was bearable. He was not ill-favored,

There was nothing in this second suitor to disgust or repel an under-bred woman who was anxious to settle in life.

There were other reasons in favor of the match. In the first place, she counted on the special friendship and protection of Mr. Dandy to push her husband forward in the bank. She heard the clerk well spoken of. Waldo was said to be clever at figures. He could cast up long columns with the speed of a calculating-machine, and, like it, was never detected in an error; why should he not rise from post to post, and expand later, perhaps, into cashier?

So she consented to make Waldo happy, and he was in the seventh heaven of delight. She did not come to him empty-handed. The few thousands she had of her own seemed to him a colossal fortune; she had her little house, too, and quite a fine lot of diamonds—some of the Wingspurs' family jewels, she told him, but which, if the truth must be told, were presented to her by Mr. Dandy.

They began housekeeping in rather a modest way, and for years they were never too flush of money. They had to wait many years before Waldo became cashier. At last came a grand stroke of luck. Mr. Candulent died, leaving Mr. Dandy alone. The bank was at once reconstituted; Mr. Dandy wanted new blood, with the solid help of some one he could trust. Waldo became a partner with a fractional share. This gradually increased, till, after some ten years' labor, Mr. Dandy withdrew himself almost entirely from business, and left Mr. Waldo with half profits and a clear income of twenty thousand a year.

And now Mrs. Waldo began to make the money fly. She reveled in these riches. It was her only compensation, she told herself, for marrying Waldo, and she meant to make the most of it. Old Waldo degenerated into a kind of financial stoker, whose only business was to keep the domestic engines constantly supplied with cash. Otherwise he was quite a cipher in his own house—in it, but not of it; less at home there than the meanest of the gangs of guests by whom it was continually infested.

See him as he slowly comes down-stairs the morning after the bonds had been stolen from the strong-room of the bank. He still retained the habits of his youth; rose with the lark, long before the servants in Carlton Gardens, of whom he was rather afraid; had finished his lonely breakfast, and was off to the City an hour or more before any of the ladies of the family appeared.

A portly figure, all in decorous, shiny black, save for the buff waistcoat and the snowy shirt-front with its frill, walking with an

air that was rather consequential than dignified, but with his rosy face fringed with white whiskers, high shirt collars, and stiffly starched light tie, looking the very essence of solid respectability—a typical City potentate, a man of wealth and mark, highly esteemed in the east, if not in the west, end of the town.

“A party last night?” he asked of the footman, who had made his tea, and was buttering his toast. The butler did not condescend to wait on Mr. Waldo; besides, the head servant was not yet downstairs.

“Small and hearly, sir. To see the dress rehearsal, and afterward a dance.”

“Kept up late?”

“Arf after three. Hope you weren’t disturbed, sir?”

Disturbed! He had passed a sleepless night. Seldom, indeed, could he shut out the unceasing din of the fiddles; but this last night the banker was kept awake by what had occurred at the bank. Poor Surtees! they had been clerks together, had known each other ever so long, and now at the end of it all his old friend and colleague was accused of robbing the bank. Sleep! He had tossed, and tumbled, and groaned the whole night through, seeking in vain to make excuses for the cashier. The more he thought over it the blacker and the more impossible of explanation Mr. Surtees’s conduct appeared.

His heart was heavy within him that morning; he eat little or no breakfast, and it was with none of his customary alacrity that he prepared to start for the City.

“Anything else I can do, sir?” asked the footman.

“Is the brougham at the door, Albert?” asked Mr. Waldo, a little doubtfully.

“Well, no, sir; I think not. The capping, I believe, took it. He had to catch an early train.”

“You’d better get me a cab, then”—Mr. Waldo was accustomed to be disappointed about the carriages, for which he paid so large a sum every year—“or stay, Albert; I’ll walk as far as Waterloo Place, and pick up a bus.”

With that the City magnate took up his hat, and was about to seek the humble vehicle which daily conveys so many other financiers eastward, when the butler, making his first appearance, came up to his master and said:

“Mademoiselle, sir, has come from Mrs. Waldo, to say that Mrs. Waldo will call for you at the bank, to-day, about four.”

"Very good," replied Mr. Waldo; "say I shall be very pleased to see her."

The fact being that the proposed attention gave him no pleasure at all. He knew that such an honor preceded some extravagant demand upon his purse.

Mrs. Waldo, in her struggle upward to the highest social levels, had her slices of good and ill fortune. The first came to her in a series of accidents which made her son heir-presumptive to the Wingspur peerage. It was by no means a rich title, and the Lord Wingspur for the time being was an improvident nobleman, who promptly realized the advantages which might accrue from opening up friendly relations with Waldo's bank.

Her chief cross was the pushing dispositions of her own relatives, especially her sister, Mrs. Bonastre, who after a long struggle had gained an excellent position on the provincial stage. She had married an actor who was also a success, and much to Mrs. Waldo's disgust they came to London to push their fortunes together. Bonastre was an undemonstrative person, but beneath a calm surface ran silent depths of cool determination. Mr. Bonastre had a set purpose in coming to London. This purpose was to have a theater of his own, and to make money. For the indispensable capital he counted, rightly or wrongly, upon Waldo's bank. Mrs. Bonastre was a pushing person, with a very good opinion of herself—a jolly, off-handed, and noisy woman in the prime of life and looks, was fully aware of this, and equally keen.

Their chances of success seemed small enough at first. They had not, in fact, been received with open arms at Carlton Gardens. Mrs. Waldo had hinted that she could not have the Bonastres much at the house.

Soon after Mr. Waldo started for the bank in the manner I have just described, Mrs. Waldo awoke from rosy dreams. After a couple of hours spent in personal adornment with the assistance of Mlle. Fanchette, a treasure of a French maid, whose almost priceless services she had only recently secured, she came down into her *boudoir*—a sweet room overlooking St. James's Park, which no one entered except by Mrs. Waldo's special favor or invitation.

She was seated here at a pretty marquetry writing-table, in high good humor; for she momentarily expected a visit from Lady Wingspur, when Fanchette appeared.

"Mrs. Bonastre, ma'am, you know, of the Royal Roscius"—the relationship was known only in the family circle, and not yet

crenly acknowledged in the house—"she is most anxious to see you."

"Does she know I am at home?"

"*Ces jeunes mees*—Mrs. Bonastre is with them—said madame was *chez elle*."

With a gesture of displeasure Mrs. Waldo said the visitor might be admitted.

"My dear," she began, in a stiff, ungenial way, "you know I am always delighted to see you. But if you could select any time but the forenoon, especially after a dance, I should greatly prefer it."

"Don't rate me, Relia, as if I was late for rehearsal or had missed my call. I came on business, to see the girls rehearse, you know. I should not have troubled you only I have something important, particular, to say."

"Important to me?"

"Indirectly so; that is if you have any sisterly feeling. It is life and death to us."

"Money, I suppose?" Mrs. Waldo was like ice. "Are you in debt? If so, you're much to blame. I believe your salaries are good."

"Generous and disinterested creature, it is as you suppose; our salaries are good, more than sufficient for present needs. But what we want is to make our fortunes."

"Ah! strange wish!"

"Which we are certain to do by taking the Roscius. The lease and management have been offered to us on most advantageous terms. All we want is £5000."

"Dear me! no more?"

"And that we want Mr. Waldo to lend us from the bank."

"You must be mad to ask such a thing. Do you suppose Mr. Waldo is made of money, that he can squander it on every silly, ridiculous scheme? Of course, it is out of the question."

"I said you would never agree. Bengy thought differently. But then he said if you refused he would raise the money from the Jews on the strength of being brother-in-law to a banker. How would the bank like that?"

"I declare you are a most unprincipled pair."

"You see we are actors, my dear. A century ago we were denied Christian burial. I dare say you would like to have us buried alive now. Well, *au revoir*, Relia, dear. Take my advice, and

think over this; at any rate, you might mention it to your good man."

And Mrs. Bonastre made her exit with much satisfaction.

Mrs. Waldo remained in no enviable state of mind. But soon she smoothed the frowns from her forehead, and wreathed her lips in sweetest smiles to receive Lady Wingspur.

Her ladyship was a bony, angular woman, prematurely gray, with an eyeglass, an unmusical voice, and a supercilious stare. But she was evidently anxious to be agreeable to Mrs. Waldo. She had come expressly, she said, to say that at last the day for the next Drawing-Room had been fixed. Would Mrs. Waldo now make up her mind as to the presentation of her dear girls?

Next after Mrs. Waldo, her daughters reigned supreme in Carlton Gardens. They had everything pretty much their own way. Three loud, bouncing, roistering girls, full of life and spirits, with a fair share of good looks, fond of apparel somewhat too gorgeous, and amusements a little *risqués* and fast. Clara, the eldest, was especially proud of her strength; Augusta, the second, of her horsemanship and driving; Helena, the third, of her elocution and dramatic powers.

"It is my dearest wish that they should go to court," said Mrs. Waldo, with a sigh. "But—"

"There need be no difficulty, dear Mrs. Waldo," observed her ladyship, warmly. "If you like I will charge myself with the whole affair."

Heaven seemed opening its portals wide for Mrs. Waldo; disclosing within a vista of State concerts and State balls.

"It is really too good of you, Lady Wingspur," she gasped, nearly breathless with excitement. "How can I thank you sufficiently?"

"Not at all. Between relations, you know—for of course we are connected"—it was the first time she had made the admission—"there need be no talk of gratitude."

Then she got up to go, but said one last word. Like a lady's postscript, it was the germ and essence of the whole affair.

"I believe Lord Wingspur is going in a day or two to see Mr. Waldo at the bank."

"Mr. Waldo will be highly honored."

"There is some question about mortgages—on the Scotch estate. I am so stupid about money matters I can not explain; but I believe he wants a rearrangement—an advance, I believe—"

The scales fell from Mrs. Waldo's eyes. The presentation, then, was a purely commercial transaction after all!

"Perhaps you will prepare Mr. Waldo for Lord Wingspur's visit. A word from you would do so much," said Lady Wingspur, blandly.

"I fear you overrate my influence, Lady Wingspur. But I promise to do all I can."

The compact was signed, sealed, and delivered in these few words. Yet both parties to the bargain seemed satisfied, and Lady Wingspur took her leave, Mrs. Waldo accompanying her.

As they passed one of the drawing-rooms on the same floor with the boudoir an extraordinary uproar fell upon their ears, a wild sort of glee or chorus, with a loud stamping of feet, followed by shouts of laughter. Lady Wingspur looked at Mrs. Waldo inquiringly.

"It's the girls; they're rehearsing. We're to have some theatricals, you know."

"Oh, how interesting—how amusing! I delight in theatricals. Do let us go in; may I, do you think? May I?"

Mrs. Waldo, in reply, opened the door without ceremony, and the two ladies walked into the drawing-room, where five figures were dancing a mad breakdown, Mrs. Bonastre leading as they "walked round," Agatha, Clara, and Helena followed. Last of all came Bob Surtees, with his face blackened, and all were beating hands and feet in time as they sung the chorus to "Nancy Lee," the popular air just then in vogue.

Every one was too busy at first to notice the entrance of Mrs. Waldo and Lady Wingspur, and for some minutes the wild performance continued. It was not until Lady Wingspur, having carefully inspected everybody through her eyeglass, said, "Surely it is Mrs. Bonastre? I thought I knew her face," that the latter's attention was attracted. The dance ceased suddenly. The Waldo girls came up, breathless, to Lady Wingspur to stammer out, "How do you do?" Bob Surtees hid himself behind the door, and Mrs. Bonastre took in the situation at a glance.

"So that is your dear friend and relative, Lady Wingspur?" she whispered to Mrs. Waldo. "Please introduce me."

"No, no," faltered her sister; "not now. She can not wait."

"You mean that you are ashamed of me, of Mrs. Bonastre, the actress. You deserve to be exposed, Relia, and I'll do it now. I didn't think you were so mean."

She was moving a little toward where Lady Wingspur was standing, when Mrs. Waldo stopped her.

"Please, Rina, spare me; at least for to-day, anything rather than that."

"Will you get Samuel to lend us the five thou'?"

"Yes, yes; I will try."

"You must promise. You know you have only to ask."

"Well, I promise. There."

Mr. Waldo had good reason to dread his wife's visit in the City that day. After it he found himself pledged to two new operations—a mortgage on a rotten property and an advance to bolster up a doubtful theatrical speculation.

CHAPTER IV.

A GARDEN-PARTY.

THE entertainments given by the Waldos were as various as they were frequent. Those in the London house were limited generally to London friends, the great people, or that best imitation of them with whom the ambitious Waldos loved to be associated.

But besides these high-class gatherings there were others, the scene of which was the suburban villa at Kew; an overgrown cottage, still called the Rookery, but greatly enlarged and beautified, with a fine old garden running down to the river. Here on three or four Saturdays during the season the Waldos cleared off their minor obligations; repaid the kindnesses of early years from people they could now patronize, and did fresh kindnesses on their own account.

A frequent guest at Kew was Percy Meggitt. He stood well with Mrs. Waldo, who much appreciated his greasy, sycophantic deference; and, strange to say, the banker's wife was always on her best behavior with him—quite cordial, not to say affectionate.

One day she had found Mr. Meggitt lounging against the doorway of the drawing-room where they danced in the afternoons, and had rallied him quite playfully.

"What, Mr. Meggitt; doing nothing I declare! How idle of you, and so many pretty girls wanting partners."

Meggitt made a theatrical sort of bow with his heels closed.

"I am at your orders, Mrs. Waldo; but," he added, familiarly, "I would far rather dance with you."

The great lady by no means took this pleasantry amiss; but said, with a gratified smirk—

“I never dance now, I am too old.”

“Oh! Mrs. Waldo; why, they take you for Captain Wingspur’s sister.”

She rapped the insinuating dog on the knuckles with her fan.

“Thank you, sir; as a reward of that I will introduce you to one of the prettiest girls here—Miss Surtees; your Mr. Surtees’s daughter—unless you know her already?”

“I ought to, but I don’t,” he said, and he was led off, nothing loath.

Josephine’s reception of Meggitt was not encouraging. He was not at all to her taste; she disliked his appearance at first sight, and his manner did not please her.

Meggitt, vain and self-satisfied though he was, saw this, and tried to impress her with a sense of his importance.

“You have heard of me, I dare say, Miss Surtees?” he said, as he passed his hands conceitedly through his rather sparse straw-colored locks.

“I can not say that I have,” replied Josephine, simply and coldly.

“I thought, perhaps, your father or your brother might have mentioned my name. I am a colleague of your father’s, you know.”

“Oh, are you in the bank?”

“Certainly; assistant-cashier. I have been very fortunate, you see.”

“Yes?” Josephine’s remark implied that she knew very little about the bank.

“It only took me eleven years to get the billet. Now, your father was fourteen, and six more before he became head. Now, I mean to be cashier long before that.”

“In my father’s place! I sincerely hope you won’t,” said Josephine, heartily. “What is to become of him?”

“Oh, well, there must be movement—promotions and all that. Perhaps he’ll be a partner. Mr. Waldo’s case is a precedent, and Mr. Dandy is getting very old.”

“It’s horrible to be waiting for dead men’s shoes. That’s the worst of the army, Bob says.”

“Bob’s your brother—I know. Know him intimately; capital chap, Bob!”

“It’s odd that he never mentions your name!”

"Doesn't he? Well, it *is* odd, seeing that I've been down to Aldershot to dine with him times out of mind; and he's often dined with me; I wonder he hasn't spoken of me."

"My brother does not keep me informed of all his movements, or of those of his friends."

"Has he never spoken of Captain Wingspur—Mrs. Waldo's son? He'll be Lord Wingspur."

"Very seldom."

"Captain Wingspur's in the cavalry—the dragoons. I've dined at their mess, too. Your brother's only in the infantry. I should prefer the cavalry if I were in the service."

"No doubt it would suit you best," replied Miss Surtees, with a tinge of irony in her voice that was quite lost upon Mr. Meggitt.

The acquaintance thus unpropitiously begun did not progress very rapidly. Yet Percy Meggitt paid Miss Surtees a great deal of attention whenever he got the chance. His devotion might have won upon a sillier girl; it merely hardened Josephine against him and increased her dislike.

Just a week after the bank robbery the Waldos gave one of their garden-parties at Kew.

Mr. and Miss Surtees were among the guests, for as yet no rumor of the charge which hung over the cashier had traveled beyond the bank.

Mr. Surtees sat, silent and unhappy, under the trees; Josephine beside him, equally sad, reflecting her father's mood, without knowing why.

To them came Meggitt, who had arrived late, and asked Miss Surtees to dance.

She declined, rather abruptly.

Mr. Meggitt's face was flushed, and Josephine liked his manner less than ever that afternoon.

"Nonsense!" said her father. "You must not sit here moping with me."

"I'm tired, father. I'd rather not dance."

"Why, you have not danced at all as yet. Don't be denied, Meggitt."

Mr. Surtees did not share his daughter's dislike to the assistant-cashier. Just now, indeed, he seemed anxious to conciliate and keep friends with Mr. Percy Meggitt.

"There," said Meggitt, "obey your aged parent, and come along."

Josephine reluctantly took his arm, and they went off together.

Meggitt danced well, although in rather a florid style, and Josephine loved waltzing. She almost forgot her dislike to her partner in her keen enjoyment of the music and the movement.

"You are a stunner," cried Meggitt, with a gasp for breath as they stopped. "Out and out the best mover I know."

His bold eyes expressed admiration unspoken, but quite undisguised, for her glowing beauty, heightened as it was by the rapid dance.

"Let's go and have some fizz," he cried, tucking her arm under his own, and leading her off almost by force.

"I'd rather go back to my father," Josephine declared. "I want no refreshments."

"I do; we'll take 'em by the way. You see," he went on confidentially, "the fact is I'm rather 'on the scoop' to-day. We've been having such a bit of fun. There were half a dozen of us, Scotch Mac, and Billy Fisher, and Joe Horrocks, and a lot more. We all met as we were leaving the City, and we went into the Gaiety bar. We had a magnum of the 'boy,' for which we went odd man. Then Mac began to toss Billy for sovereigns, and the game went round. Didn't give over till half past three; that's what made me so late; and so thirsty now."

These coarse confessions increased Josephine's disgust. She looked round impatiently, while Meggitt lingered over his champagne, seeking in vain for some friends with whom she might escape from her partner.

"First-class liquor the governor always gives. He does us well, don't he? To rights, and no mistake."

"Come, if you please," said Josephine, with a toss of her head and a stamp of the foot.

"Can't bear to part with you, my de— Miss Surtees, I mean. Let's have another dance first."

"If you won't take me to my father at once I'll leave you and go alone."

"Oh, well, it's not worth quarreling over. Come along; which way?"

The grounds at the Rookery were spacious, and Meggitt, flushed and excited though he was, knew them well—far better than Josephine. The path he took to the spot where they had left Mr. Surtees was by no means the most direct. It was more shady, he said, but he omitted to add that it was more secluded and unfrequented.

"Are we going right?" asked Josephine soon, rather nervously.

"I can't say, 'm sure. I believe we've lost ourselves. Anyhow, let's sit down a bit, and rest."

"No, no. I won't stay here. I shall leave you unless you come on at once."

"Do sit down; please do;" and as he spoke he laid his hand upon her arm. "I want to talk to you. I've such a lot to say. I want to tell you that, by Jove, you're out and out the prettiest girl—"

"Mr. Meggitt!" Josephine's eyes flashed.

"I swear it—the prettiest, sweetest, most charming girl I know."

"I shall listen no longer—"

"Oh, come; you *are* hard-hearted. What makes you so shy?" She had indignantly resented his touching her; but as she moved away he followed her close. "My sweetest, dearest pet," he began, and suddenly threw his arm round her waist.

"How dare you!" cried Josephine, striving eagerly, madly, but for the moment unsuccessfully, to evade his grasp.

"I will have one kiss, I swear," he shouted almost in her ear.

"Help! help! Bob! Bob!" It seemed natural to her to call for her brother, although he was miles away.

"There's no one within hearing, my pet," went on the brute, exultingly. "You shall pay the penalty of your obstinacy."

He stooped over toward the burning, blushing face, and his mustachios actually brushed her cheek, when he felt a tight grip on his collar, and in another second he measured his length on the ground.

Josephine was too excited, too flushed and indignant, to realize all at once what had occurred. All she knew was that some one had delivered her, rescued her from insult, but rage against her persecutor still predominated above gratitude for such timely succor.

As for Meggitt, he gathered himself slowly together, and as he rose from his humiliating position tried to bluster and bully the man who stood over him.

"What d'ye mean by striking me?" he said; "I've half a mind to—"

"No, you have not," said the other, coolly. "You haven't the pluck to face a man. Don't square up at me. Drop it at once, or I'll drop *you*."

The new-comer spoke so sharply and looked so determined that Meggitt's heart sunk within him.

"Who the deuce are you?" stammered the assistant-cashier.

"A gentleman, which is more than you are!"

"I'm as good as you!" retorted Meggitt.

"I don't kiss young ladies—I beg your pardon." He corrected himself and raised his hat to Josephine. "I don't try to kiss young ladies against their will."

"How can I thank you sufficiently?" Josephine now found courage to say, her eyes filling with tears and a bright flush crimsoning her cheek as she thought of the indignity from which he had saved her.

"Who are you, I repeat?" said Meggitt, with a fresh show of assurance. "I insist upon satisfaction."

"My name is Sir Richard Daunt, my address the Albany, 99A, where you or any of your friends will find me, very much at your service. Now, pray, who are you?"

"His name is Meggitt!" cried Josephine, in the most contemptuous tones. "He is a clerk or something in the bank, under my father. Mr. Surtees shall hear of his conduct."

"I don't care that for your father!" replied Meggitt, impudently. "My credit at Waldo's is as good, nay, better, than his. Your father, indeed! Why, your father is no better than a—"

Sir Richard Daunt caught Meggitt roughly by the collar, and shook him as he cried—

"Not another word! Take yourself off directly. Do you hear what I say? Go—at once."

Meggitt muttered some unintelligible threats, and slunk away.

"Now, if you will accept my escort, Miss Surtees," said Sir Richard, turning toward her, "we will rejoin your friends. I ought, perhaps, to introduce myself, but you have just heard my name."

"My father is here. Let us go to him. He will like to thank you in person for your chivalry."

Josephine's eyes were sparkling; her whole face lit up with the gratitude she felt. It was now for the first time Sir Richard Daunt realized what a beautiful girl he had befriended.

"I shall be charmed to be presented to your father," he said. "But, Miss Surtees, might I suggest—it is a delicate matter, I know you will forgive me, I'm sure—but why say anything about what has occurred? Affairs of that kind had best be buried in oblivion."

"But perhaps Mr. Meggitt will tell his own version."

"Mr. Meggitt will say nothing, I feel sure, and if he does—"

Sir Richard's face grew black.

"Mayn't I tell Bob?" pleaded Josephine,

"Bob?" the interrogation was rather abrupt. Had some fellow already the right to be called Bob by this very charming girl?"

"Yes; my brother Bob. He is in the 119th at Aldershot."

"Oh! your brother." Sir Richard was relieved. "No; I don't think I'd even tell your brother."

And so it was settled. Thus the acquaintance, begun under circumstances likely to ripen it quickly, was further advanced by the possession of a very delicate secret in common.

Josephine at the end of the day felt that in spite of Meggitt's insult she had never enjoyed a garden-party more. The fact was Sir Richard never left her side, and before they parted had obtained permission to call at Chiswick—to be introduced to Bob.

CHAPTER V.

SIR RICHARD DAUNT.

SIR RICHARD DAUNT, the rescuer of Miss Surtees from the too demonstrative attentions of Mr. Meggitt, was a young baronet of good estate, well known in London society. He went everywhere, knew everybody, and was just the sort of man that the Waldos liked to have constantly at the house. They had met him a year or two before in Switzerland. Within a week Mrs. Waldo had adopted Sir Richard as one of the family, and Clara told him she felt as if she had known him for years. Sir Richard, on his return to England, rather avoided the Waldos; but he could not quite refuse all invitations—hence his presence at Kew on the occasion already recorded, when Clara Waldo saw with a jaundiced, jealous eye the attention he paid Miss Surtees.

She would never have tried had she known Dick Daunt as well as did his best friends. With them he was about as wary, wide-awake, and hard-hearted as any man in the town. By thirty he had gained a very wide experience of life, had seen as much as most, and perhaps more. It was extraordinary how soon people found out the value of Richard Daunt's advice, and what numbers came to him for it. He was consulted constantly, and in the most delicate and confidential affairs. His sound knowledge of law—for law was really his profession—and his logical, practical mind made his opinions invaluable. In this way he came to know a great deal, far more than any one who looked at his quiet, smiling face, with the steady, thoughtful eyes, would have supposed.

But Sir Richard was as reticent as he was well-informed. He kept his secrets to himself. It was keen enjoyment to use his analytical faculties, and he often devoted himself to the unraveling of these social mysteries. The taste grew on him, however, and he was not satisfied with the conquest of problems in his own social world. Ere long his investigations extended to the great public crimes of the day. He often thought, no doubt with an amateur's presumption, that he could set the police right when on the wrong track, or give them the "straightest tip" when altogether at fault. By degrees they all knew him in Scotland Yard; knew him, and, it must be confessed, often laughed at him, too.

But he had his friends there; Mr. Faske among them. That astute detective saw his advantage in cultivating the acquaintance of friends in every class, and he counted it no small privilege to be allowed to call sometimes at the Albany and have a chat with Sir Richard Daunt.

When, therefore, Mr. Faske met Sir Richard, one Sunday afternoon, as he came out of Mr. Surtees's house on Chiswick Mall, the detective, although he only raised his hat to the baronet, resolved to pay a visit to the Albany the very next day.

Mr. Faske was a little at fault. That worthy police officer found himself foiled in his endeavors to ascertain anything to Mr. Surtees's detriment or discredit. Down Hammersmith way the Surteeses enjoyed the highest reputation.

There was nothing suspicious, not a shadow of mystery about them; no lavish expenditure, no pressing debts, no secret entanglements to hint at a reason for the theft of the bonds. A couple of weeks had thus slipped by in profitless inquiries, and Mr. Faske was still as far as ever from fixing the crime upon the cashier.

Yet that Mr. Surtees was guilty Mr. Faske had not the smallest doubt. It was his method to come to rapid, sometimes they proved hasty, conclusions. He had done so in the case of the robbery at Waldo's bank. The culprit was clearly Mr. Surtees. How was this to be proved? Only by facts; by evidence which would certainly be forthcoming if only he could lay hold of it. Sir Richard Daunt might be of some assistance to him, and to Sir Richard Daunt he came.

"Well, Faske," said Sir Richard, pleasantly, pointing to an arm chair, "I have not seen you for an age. Been away?"

"No, Sir Richard; I have been tied up too closely at home."

"Nothing particular stirring, is there?" asked the baronet, "I

have not seen a case mentioned in the papers that seemed worthy of you."

"There is more happens than is mentioned in the papers," said the detective, nursing his leg, and beginning, as usual, to examine his shoe-string intently.

He sat there absorbed and preoccupied, and for so long that Sir Richard at last cried:

"Why, Faskel! what's on your mind? Out with it. I know you're bursting with some mysterious affair."

Mr. Faske started, and put down his leg.

"It's a bank business," he confessed, but somewhat reluctantly; "a big robbery—of bonds."

"Any clew?"

"None; although I know the thief," said the detective, with conviction.

"But can't bring it home to him; I see. Very interesting, indeed."

"I've not the slightest doubt in my mind," he said, at length, "but I am bothered about proofs."

"British juries have an awkward way of insisting upon proofs," remarked the baronet.

Mr. Faske looked as though he hated all juries, and would gladly have seen that palladium of British liberty abolished.

Another pause, which the detective broke abruptly.

"Do you often go to Chiswick, Sir Richard?"

"Now and again. Why do you ask?" Sir Richard began to be on the defensive.

"A charming place, retired, yet handy for the river."

"I thought you must be fond of it, Faske; I've seen you there frequently of late."

"You have?" Mr. Faske sometimes forgot, in his keenness to watch others, that his own movements might be observed.

"Certainly; in the neighborhood of Chiswick Mall. Might I, without indiscretion, inquire what takes you so often that way?"

"I go there to—to fish," replied the detective, with some hesitation.

"Or sketch from nature, or pick flowers, or play the accordion. What nonsense it is," went on Sir Richard, suddenly changing his tone, "all this beating about the bush! Out with it, Faske; I will help you if I can."

"You can, Sir Richard—that is, if you choose. Will you answer

me one question? Yes? How long have you known Mr. Surtees? There!"

"Mr. Surtees! What have you to do with Mr. Surtees?"

Mr. Faske's eyes were again on his shoe-string, and he did not immediately reply.

"Mr. Surtees is cashier in—a—bank," he said, slowly, and raising his eyes to look keenly into Sir Richard's.

"Why, man alive, Faske, can you mean—" a light was breaking in upon Sir Richard Daunt. "Oh, it is impossible; you must be wrong—utterly and entirely wrong."

"Look here, Sir Richard, I'll tell you all in half a dozen words," said Mr. Faske, speaking now quite fast, but very distinctly. "Waldo's is the bank that's robbed, and Mr. Surtees is the thief. But I can't run him in."

"So you come to me, a friend of the family, to give you a helping hand? Thank you, Mr. Faske; but you've made a slight mistake."

"I thought as how you might know something. Don't get savage, Sir Richard; you know you've often helped us before."

This compliment to his powers as a detective did not pacify Sir Richard Daunt, who got up as though to show Mr. Faske the door.

"Now, see here, Sir Richard, listen till I tell you all about the affair. You shall judge for yourself."

With that Mr. Faske proceeded to lay the whole case from his own point of view before the baronet. As Mr. Faske claimed, the grounds for suspicion were certainly strong.

"I tell you, Sir Richard, it's as clear as noonday—a 'put-up job,' done in the house by the cashier himself, or my name's not Jesse Faske; and I'm not alone in my opinion; the firm think the same, take my word for that."

"Then that's what Meggitt meant," said Daunt, incautiously, aloud, as he recalled the assistant-cashier's brutal innuendo at Kew."

"Meggitt?" inquired Mr. Faske. "I know him; the assistant-cashier. What did he say, and when?"

But Sir Richard would not be drawn out further.

"You'd better ask him. I'll have nothing more to say to this affair; I positively decline to believe anything evil of Mr. Surtees. It's monstrous. That man a thief! Never! You should see him at home in his own house; so dignified, so well bred. And then his daughter—"

"Oh! there's a young lady in the case; a Miss Surtees, eh?" said

the cunning detective, gently. The baronet, no doubt, was sweet on the girl. Mr. Fiske saw that he could do no more good in the Albany. He was in the enemy's camp, so to speak; and he got up to go.

"Well, Sir Richard, you always was hard to persuade. Wait till next Central Criminal Court, or the one after, you'll admit then I was not far wrong."

With that Mr. Fiske, poising his hat, as usual, lightly on his head, went his way, determined, before he was much older, to see whether Mr. Meggitt could throw any light on the affair.

CHAPTER VI.

COLLECTING EVIDENCE.

MR. WALDO had laid strict injunctions on the detective that no inquiries tending to incriminate Mr. Surtees should be made at the bank. Mr. Fiske had resented this restriction, feeling that it narrowed his field of investigation in the very direction it promised to be most fruitful. But he had followed his instructions. After satisfying himself that the place had not been broken into, nor the strong-room tampered with, he had not returned to the bank. So far, too, he had refrained from cross-questioning any of the *employés*.

Now he learned quite by accident that one of them, this Meggitt, was behind the scenes; that not only had he heard of the robbery, which was supposed to be still a profound secret, but that he had an opinion of his own on the affair, and had hinted at it to Sir Richard Daunt. There was obviously more in this than met the eye.

Waldo or no Waldo, orders or no orders, Mr. Meggitt must be got at, and made to tell all he knew.

One of Mr. Fiske's young men, a promising tyro of Scotland Yard, who within forty-eight hours had tracked Percy Meggitt from the bank to his chambers in the Adelphi, thence to the Junior Belgrave Club, and, later on in the evening, to the Royal Roscius, where the assistant cashier was lost at the stage-door. He was the intimate friend, it appeared, of Mr. Bonastre.

Now Mr. Fiske happened to know Benny Bonastre very well; the actor, in fact, was under obligations to him. And by a little adroit maneuvering he secured an invitation to a theatrical sup-

per, given by the new manager of the Royal Roscius, at which he hoped to meet the assistant-cashier.

At that supper he got a seat by Meggitt's side, and soon they were the best friends in the world.

"I suppose you know everybody here?" said Mr. Faske, in an insinuating way, as he look around the table.

"All that are worth knowing," replied Mr. Meggitt. "The company is rather mixed, you understand. Can't help it, you see, in such affairs as these."

"Who is that gray-haired old gentleman—I mean the man with the gray hair dyed black, who must be seventy at least, and tries to look twenty-five?"

"Oh, that's Lord Wingspur, a great patron of the drama; very old friend of Mrs. Bonastre's, I have heard."

"Ah? Do you know him?"

"Well, not exactly, but I do the captain, Mrs. Waldo's son, who will be Lord Wingspur by and by. We have had many a merry night together. Only a few weeks ago he dined with me at my club—he and young Surtees."

"Surtees!" interrupted the detective. "I seem to know the name. What Surtees is that?"

"You may know the man himself if you like. He is sitting over there—the tall, soldier-like chap. He is in the army, in some foot regiment. I will introduce you, if you like, after supper. Do you ever play *baccarat*? If you do, he is your man."

"Is that his line? A gambler, eh?" said Faske softly, trying, from long habit, to push back his chair, and examine his shoe-string.

This was an important piece of news. The fact that the son played high explained the father's need for money at all costs.

"I saw him lose seven hundred pounds at *écarté* not three weeks ago without turning a hair," went on Meggitt, seemingly proud of his acquaintance with such a sportsman.

"He must be rich to risk such sums?"

"Hasn't a rap of his own. I can't tell how he does it, except that he comes down on the old man."

"A rich father, eh?"

"Well, I can't say, but I should think not. Anyway, this last business must have hit him hard, and that I happen to know. For old Surtees came to me," went on Meggitt, growing quite confidential, "and said he'd have to sell out stock to pay his son's debts."

"And did he? Do you remember the name of the stock?"

Faske never showed excitement, but he spoke eagerly, and his heart was beating fiercely as he waited for the answer.

"No, I don't. The money was paid on the nail, that's all I can tell you. What makes you so anxious to know?"

"Anxious! I'm not anxious," replied Faske, promptly: "only if I am to play *baccarat* with a man I like to be certain he can pay up if he loses. But the father can't be very flush if he has to sell out stock every time his son loses a few hundreds at play." Then, after a pause, he went on: "So he came to you to get the money?"

"I didn't say that: he told me he'd have to part with capital, and asked me to get rid of it for him, or to recommend him a broker who would dispose of bonds."

"Bonds, were they? In what stock—Portuguese, did you say?" remarked Faske, carelessly, looking at Meggitt out of the corner of his eye.

"No, I did not say Portuguese."

"You never do say anything, Mr. Meggitt."

"How do you know my name?" asked the other with some effrontery.

"Just as I know they were Portuguese bonds, and why Mr. Surtees wanted to sell them on the sly."

"This is really most extraordinary, Mr. —"

"Faske, of Scotland Yard; there's my card. I'll tell you why he wanted to sell them: because he stole them from the bank in which you are a clerk, young man. The matter has been placed in my hands, so you'd better tell us all you know, or we'll charge you as an accessory before and after the fact, and run you both in together."

Meggitt's manner changed instantly. "A detective!" he gasped. "Then all the fat's in the fire!"

"Yes, and unless you make a clean breast of it you'll be scorched in the blaze. How long have you known of the robbery?"

"I never knew of it for certain—I only suspected it. Ever since that day at the bank when Mr. Dandy was there, and you—

you—came."

"I came!"

"I think so; I am not quite sure. I have only just recognized you. It's a dreadful affair." Meggitt seemed quite agitated.

"Poor, dear Mr. Surtees! Such a nice, good man, Mr. Faske!"

Faske thought he detected just a faint tinge of irony in the tone,

"Look here, Mr Meggitt, sentiment's a fine thing, but it don't wash with me. You must put your fine feelings in your pocket and stick to business, or we shall fall out. Do you mean to tell me what you know?"

"I should be sorry, very sorry, to injure Mr. Surtees; indeed, I am quite incapable of it."

"Stuff! You must be with us or against us. Which is it to be? Look sharp, or I'll go across to Lord Wingspur—he's a Middlesex magistrate; I know him, if you don't—and get him to sign a warrant for your arrest this very night. How would you like to leave the stage with"—Faske lightly shook his coat-tails, and there was a rattle of steel—"the darbies on? They're there waiting till they're wanted. Come, which is it to be?"

"I shall be very happy to tell you all I know, Mr. Faske," said Meggitt, eagerly but very humbly, "only it can't be here. My chambers are not far off—in the Adelphi. Why not come over there?"

They were small rooms, but well furnished in a florid, showy style. Mr. Faske threw himself into one of the arm-chairs and said—

"Now, sir, I propose to ask you a few questions. You're in Waldo's bank?" began the detective.

"I am. I have been for eleven years. I now hold the post of assistant-cashier."

"Immediately under Mr. Surtees? Are you good friends?"

"The best. I like him, and I think he likes me. He speaks confidentially to me, and often consults me about his private affairs."

"As when he asked you to help him to sell those bonds?"

"He only asked me if I knew of a broker who could sell them for him quietly. He seemed anxious no one should know he was parting with these bonds."

"Did it occur to you why? Had you any idea that they were—stolen?"

"Mr. Faske!" cried Meggitt, indignant at the imputation the remark conveyed.

"Don't look injured; I'm not accusing you—at least, not for the present—of any guilty knowledge. Besides, in no case need you criminate yourself. All I want to get at is what you thought were Mr. Surtees's reasons for wishing to keep the whole affair dark."

"I had an idea certainly. I fancied he did not wish the firm to

know that he was realizing his capital, and for the purpose of meeting his son's gambling-debts."

"You mentioned nothing about all this to your employers?"

"No. Why should I? Besides, I felt bound to respect Mr. Surtees's expressed desire for secrecy."

"And you did not connect the cashier's request with the loss of the bonds from the strong room?"

"I tell you I had not heard of the robbery."

"You guessed something had gone wrong; it is your own admission."

"Yes, but I knew nothing of the details. I knew none of the particulars of the theft until I heard them from you to night."

"Didn't you?" remarked Mr. Faske, softly, as he stared at his shoe string. "And why, then, did you suspect Mr. Surtees?"

"How could I suspect him?"

"As a matter of fact, then, you did not?"

"No."

"Then what did you mean when you said your credit—yours, a junior's—was better at Waldo's than his—that in fact the cashier was under a cloud?"

"When did I say that?"

"About a fortnight ago, to Sir Richard Daunt, at Kew."

Meggitt started, and turned rather pale.

"You can't humbug me," went on the detective sternly, nursing his leg; "I know most things, and I can draw my own conclusions. Again, what did you mean by your remark at the supper-table, not an hour ago, that all the fat was in the fire?"

Meggitt was silent.

"Isn't there an obvious interpretation to both these remarks? To me it's all as clear as noonday. You know more than we do. Now, what is it you know? Will you tell us of your own accord, or must we make you?"

"Make me!" cried Meggitt, sulkily, and evidently driven into a corner.

"Yes, we can force you to speak, Mr. Meggitt. You wish to stand well with your employers. You come next in the bank after Mr. Surtees—"

"It's that which seals my lips, Mr. Faske. It would be so mean to 'round' on a man whom I should probably succeed."

"You'll never be cashier if you hang back now, you may take your oath of that," said the detective, with great decision. "It's

far more likely that the firm will think you're a pal of Surtees's, and in the swim. You must make up your mind at once whether you'll stick to Surtees or to the bank. Look sharp about it, for I've no time to lose."

Faske took out his watch ostentatiously.

"I'll give you five minutes; not a second more. So now you know."

"You're a hard man!" cried Meggitt, with a half-groan; "and you've got the whip-hand of me. The fact is, I overheard a few words that passed between the partners that day you came to the bank. It was about some missing Portuguese bonds."

"Ah! and you remembered what Mr. Surtees had asked you? put two and two together and—"

"Precisely."

"Still you said nothing to the firm! Do you know that your silence may be misconstrued? But come, hurry up, we're not getting forward. I understand why you suspected the cashier. He asks you to help him to dispose of certain stock. Soon afterward some of the same sort disappears from the strong-room, to which the partners and he alone have access. Is there nothing more?"

"Nothing much, although in your hands, Mr. Faske, it may lead to a great deal more. I'm grieved—deeply grieved—to be the means of bringing trouble on my good friend—"

"Sentiment is wasted breath, I tell you, Mr. Meggitt. Put your fine feelings in your pocket till after I'm gone; and get on."

"I'm going to show you something, but its under compulsion, and I trust you will not bring me into the business; I should hate to have to appear, something," he went on, "which may help you forward in your inquiries."

With that he went into his bedroom, unlocked a small iron safe let into the wall, and took out a small pocket-book, from the center division of which he extracted several scraps of white paper. They had jagged edges, and were evidently part of a letter or document which had been torn up and thrown into a waste-paper basket or on the floor.

"There; will those be of any use to you?"

Faske took the bits, turned them over one by one, and then pieced them together on the table. After a long and patient examination he observed, quietly—

"It's a broker's contract, of course."

Some of the pieces were missing, but enough remained to give a

clew to the meaning of the whole. After repeated attempts Mr. Faske was satisfied with the following collocation:—

.....	Lond	ay, 187...
.....	r. Jos. Bro.....	
.....	uguese at.....	
.....	brok.....	
Account 15 M.....		£929 17 1
	Higgins & S.....	
	Goldbe.....	

“That’s near enough. It’s the contract for the sale of the stolen bonds. How did you come by it?”

“By the merest chance. I will tell you. A day or two after the row at the bank I went into the cashier’s box—you know, the glazed compartment in the corner nearest the parlor—to speak to Mr. Surtees. He was stooping over his desk, reading something. I saw at once that my entrance had put him out. He seemed agitated—upset. As I stood there about to speak he took off the desk the piece of paper at which he had been looking, and tore it up before my eyes.”

“Without remark!”

“Quite. For the moment he was too confused, as I thought, to speak. I went on with my business without pretending to notice anything wrong, and then I turned to go. At that moment Mr. Waldo whistled for the cashier through the tube. We left the glass box together, but I—”

“Returned to it. I see. Simple-minded young man! Anything more?”

“No; that is all, upon my word.”

“Not much, perhaps, after all.” said the detective, thoughtfully. “Still, it will help, perhaps.”

“What do you mean to do next?” asked Meggitt.

Faske put his finger to his nose, a gesture implying that he intended to keep his own counsel, lodged the scraps of the contract into his pocket-book, and bade Mr. Meggitt good-night.

As he walked home he pondered over the strange facts elicited from the unwilling cashier. Could he identify these brokers? He looked in at Scotland Yard and consulted a London Directory.

“Higgins and Stumper, Goldbeater Alley.” There they were, sure enough; those were the people who had sold the Portuguese bonds for Mr. Joseph Bro—Bro—what? Brothers, Brotherton,

Brcnson. Most probably Brown. Brown was such a simple name to assume.

Had the culprit gone in person to the brokers? If so, he might be identified; if not—. On this hypothesis Faske felt a little unhappy. But yet it might be shown surely that the bonds were sold for Surtees, whether he called himself Surtees or Brown, otherwise how was it that Mr. Surtees was in possession of the contract, a document which, unless his own, he had no right to destroy?

"I expect he himself went to do the deal," Faske concluded at last. "A man so anxious to keep a job dark would not have intrusted it to a third person. He had already told one too many, and when Meggitt refused to help him he would probaly think it safest to act for himself."

He went straight into the City, first thing on Monday morning, and called upon a friendly stock-broker, a member of the eminent firm of Limming and Cornecup, for which he had once done some very delicate work.

"You're an early bird," airily remarked Mr. Limming, to whom we have already been introduced. "Well, what brings you here? I hope I'm not your worm."

"No, sir, but you can help me to him, I think. Do you know anything of Higgins and Stumper?"

"Goldbeater Alley? Yes, to be sure, what have they done?"

"They've been dealing in stolen bonds."

"What stock?"

"Portuguese."

"Not Waldo's? Yes? Is that so? Well, I *am* surprised!"

"You knew of the robbery, then?"

"Oddly enough the bonds belnged to us. On the day of the account Waldo sent for me, and asked me to hold over. Of course I did so. Then, at the end of the fortnight, comes a letter, private and confidential, from Mr. Waldo, inclosing a check for the amount, and begging us to buy bonds to replace those lost, as nothing had been heard of them."

"They were stolen by the cashier of the bank."

"Old Surtees! That highly respectable man! Come, Faske, that's going a little too far."

"Stolen," said Faske, emphatically: "and sold by him to Higgins and Stumper. I've got the contract in my pcket."

"For those very bonds? Are the numbers entered on the contract? That's very seldom done,"

"Well"—Faske was looking at his shoe-string, and seemed a little disconcerted—"no; the numbers are not given, but I'm morally certain they're the same bonds. All I want is legal proof."

"How will you manage that?"

"By tracing the bonds sold."

"That won't be so easy. Higgins and Stumper may have kept the numbers; and, again, they may not. The only chance for you is that they did no other transaction in Portuguese about that time. They're not in a very large way of business, you know."

"How shall I find out? Can you help me, Mr. Limming? I don't want to go to them yet. It might show my hand."

"I'll send a confidential clerk round if you like; they're under obligations to us, and if they know or remember anything they'll certainly tell."

"If they're on the square, that is?"

"You may depend upon it they're all right in such an affair as this. That's not your difficulty. You'll be pounded, I'm afraid, when you try to connect Mr. Surtees with the missing bonds."

"I shall be able to show that he sold Higgins and Stumper certain bonds," began the detective.

"In person? Is the contract in his name?"

"Well, no; it's not." Again Mr. Faske's face fell, as he made this admission. "But they, Higgins and Stumper, will surely be able to identify him."

"Yes; if he went himself."

"You may be sure he did that. I have strong reasons for thinking so."

"Well, grant it; grant that Mr. Surtees sold certain Portuguese bonds to Higgins and Stumper. Unless you can confront him with the numbers, and show that the bonds sold were identical with those missing, where is your case? What's to prevent him declaring that the bonds were his own property?"

"He would have to prove that."

"No doubt; but, even if he did not, I question whether any court would be satisfied as to his guilt. They might call it highly suspicious, but hardly sufficient to convict."

"But taken in connection with his tearing up the contract—"

"Oh! he tore up the contract, did he?"

"He was seen, detected in the very act."

"Certainly that looks very fishy. So does the whole affair; I won't deny it. However, we shall see—come back in half an hour

for the answer from Goldbeater Alley. Everything depends upon what Higgins and Stumper say."

CHAPTER VII.

TWO PAIRS OF LOVERS.

THE Waldos were very keen, this season, about giving an amateur theatrical performance. And the idea once started had promptly taken a practical shape with every chance of becoming an assured success. The girls were all fond of acting; they were promised the assistance of the Barashes. Bob Surtees, sweet as ever on Helena Waldo, was really excellent for an amateur; Sir Richard Daunt had consented to play, not to oblige Clara as she thought, but because pretty Josephine Surtees was included in the cast.

They had been arranged, these theatricals, long before Mr. Faske's visit to the Altany, and Sir Richard was already very intimate with the Surtees when he heard of the secret charge against the cashier.

He went to Chiswick nearly every day of the week for the rehearsals, which took place generally at the Rookery, Kew, and after them he often accompanied Josephine and her brother home. He was often pressed to stay and dine, an invitation he gladly accepted—at first because he really liked the society of these pleasant, unaffected people, and then because he could not resist the potent spell that Josephine was casting over him. Latterly he had an additional reason for spending all the time he could at Chiswick. He had thus an opportunity of observing Mr. Surtees, and could follow up the mental inquiry whether the cashier was an innocent or a guilty man.

They traveled generally by water drifting leisurely down the river, Bob in the bows, Daunt pulling stroke, and Josephine at the helm.

Sometimes, however, two parties were formed, and they went up stream for a spell instead of down. On these occasions they left the pair-oar at Kew, and Sir Richard, taking a pair of sculls, rowed Josephine alone, whilst Bob Surtees in another boat escorted Helena Waldo. That sportive young lady enjoyed nothing better than to steal out of the house after the rehearsal, and follow the Surtees party down to the river-side.

No more delightful *tête-à-têtes* can well be imagined. It was in one of these delightful expeditions, which encourage the interchange of confidences, that Sir Richard began to question Josephine about Mr. Surtees. He had adroitly utilized an opportunity which she had given him.

"I am very unhappy at times about my father," she had said; "I do not think he is well."

"Why do you say that?" asked Sir Richard.

"He seems to be out of spirits and depressed, quite unlike himself."

"Have you noticed this very long?"

"Five or six weeks or more."

This period coincided pretty closely with the date given by Fiske of the discovery of the robbery. It was terribly significant.

"Has he generally enjoyed good health?" went on Sir Richard.

"The very best till latterly. I can't make it out; he must have something on his mind."

"Doesn't he take you into his confidence?" and Sir Richard, as he said this, felt that a man could have no happier lot than to share his inmost thoughts with such a sweet woman as this.

"There is nothing probably to tell me," she replied.

"But have you any suspicion of anything wrong? Has nothing happened to vex or disturb him; has he any particular worries in business or about his private affairs upon his mind?" Sir Richard looked keenly at the beautiful face before him, and saw that a faint flush suffused it as he spoke these words. "Pardon me," he hastened to say, "I have no right, I know, to put such questions. No right but that of a friend who takes a deep interest in anything that gives you concern."

Josephine was silent for a time, and sat watching her hand as she listlessly let it hang over the side and drag through the flowing current.

"Sir Richard," she said, looking up, "you like Bob, don't you?"

"Immensely!" replied Daunt.

What was the meaning of this sudden question? Did it imply that the brother was connected with Mr. Surtees's trouble?"

"And he likes you?" went on Josephine.

"I think so, yes; indeed I hope so."

"Of course he does!" said Josephine, emphatically. "He thinks there is no one like you, Sir Richard—I have heard him say so more than once. I do wish you would use your influence with him."

"My influence! Surely, Miss Surtees, you overestimate my power."

"No, no, indeed, Sir Richard; I am quite certain that he would attend to anything you said—would listen quietly to your advice. I do wish you would give him a little."

"With all my heart. But on what subject?"

"Sir Richard," said Josephine, folding her hands solemnly before her, and speaking with great earnestness, "Bob is the dearest, kindest, sweetest old fellow in the world; but he has his faults."

"Like all of us."

"One terrible fault in particular—he is horribly extravagant. Not willfully wasteful, you understand; but he has no idea, I think, of the value of money. It positively runs away from him; and now, you know, he is in an expensive regiment, it is here close by at Aldershot, and he can't help coming to town."

"I understand," said Sir Richard, who was resting on his oars, as he pointed over his shoulder with his thumb to the other boat.

Josephine nodded.

"Exactly. He and Helena Waldo are devoted to each other, not that I think anything can come of it. But all this running about, you know, has led poor Bob to spend a great deal more money than he ought, and I know it vexes my father."

"But how long has this been going on?"

"For the last two or three years at least."

"Well, but that would not explain this most recent increase of depression which you say you have noticed in your father. Is it possible, do you think, that your brother has given any special cause for annoyance very lately?"

"I can't say—at least, not for certain; but I fancy, from my father's manner, which has been much more severe with Bob, that he had to pay a large sum for him not long ago."

"That would account for the change in Mr. Surtees, no doubt. He is probably afraid that he may have to do the same again."

"That is why I want you to speak to Bob, Sir Richard," said Josephine. "He is so easily led."

"Or misled."

"Just so; and I should be deeply grateful to you if you would help to lead him in the right road."

"My dear Miss Surtees," said Sir Richard, with great emphasis, "you may trust me to do all that lies in my power. Indeed, you may count upon me now and always. Nothing will give me greater pleasure than to be of service to you. I can assure you I

want to be your friend. More," he went on, with a deeper meaning in his voice; "I only wish I might claim to be much more. Will you not give me the right to help you—to share your troubles?"

Josephine's reply was inaudible, but her heightened color, and the silence which came over her for the rest of the voyage home, satisfied Sir Richard that he had not spoken in vain.

Meanwhile in the boat ahead the following conversation had been in progress:

"What's the matter, Bob?" Helena cried gayly, as she had taken her seat at the stern; "you seem very dull."

Bob shook his head, as if oppressed with unnumbered woes.

"I've something on my mind, something awful," he said gloomily.

"Don't look like that, Bob; you frighten me," cried the gay madcap, across whose bright, butterfly-like existence no shadow had fallen as yet. "Well, don't tell me, that's all. It will keep for another time."

"It won't keep, Helena. It must come out now. I fancy you care for me, Helena—"

"Fancy? Oh, Bob!"

"You wouldn't if you knew me as I am—if you knew what a worthless, unprincipled, beggarly brute I am. But you shall know, now, this very instant, and when you've heard all, if you only tell me, I'll tie a weight to my heels and throw myself into the water, here on this very spot. Then there'll be an end of that contemptible cur, Robert Surtees."

"But, Bob, you'd be drowned!"

"Drowned! It's too good for me. I deserve to be hanged."

"Why, what have you been doing?" Helena asked, half tearful, yet doubting whether she should cry or be cross. "Oh, Bob, I do believe you've been flirting—making love to some one else."

"It's worse than that," said Bob, shaking his head sadly. "Far worse."

"Bob! Impossible."

"I have been stealing."

Helena, in her surprise, gave a genuine shriek of dismay.

"No, no; not what you think," hastily interposed Bob Surtees.

"I'm not a common thief, a burglar, a low pickpocket. I'm far worse. I'm a mean-spirited beast, that takes and spends and wastes money which does not belong to him."

"Isn't that what they call, you know—"

"I mean which belongs properly to some one else."

"I can't say I see much difference. I'm not very wise, perhaps," went on Helena.

"Of course, I got this money from my father. He gave it me, you know."

"And did *he*?—surely he didn't. Was it his? I mean, had he any more right than you to—well, to take it?"

"It was his own, of course; my father is as honest as the day. But it ought to have been kept for my sister. And now I have had it—spent it—swallowed it all up."

Then with bitter self-reproach young Robert Surtees made full confession. He told the girl of his choice everything—his wild career of extravagance, the trouble and annoyance he had caused his father, the misery he might bring on his sister.

"It is terrible, Bob. But don't be cast down," said light-hearted Helena, "we have plenty of money; you tell all this to papa, he'll soon make it all right."

But it is to be feared Bob Surtees did not find as much consolation in this liberal promise.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MISSING BONDS.

"FASKE," said Mr. Limming, when the detective returned, "you are in luck. They remember all about those bonds, and the man who brought them for sale."

"Have they got their numbers?"

"Well, no; but they did no other business in Portuguese that week, and their books show that these were passed on at once to Benoliels', the great jobbers."

"Ah!" said Faske, listening intently.

"Shall I send to Benoliels' to see if they have the numbers?"

"I think," said Faske, who had been cogitating within himself, "I will go to Messrs. Benoliel myself; they know me. I once ran in a friend of theirs for them. But tell me, Mr. Lemming, before I go: You say Higgins and Stumper remember the man who brought them the bonds. Who do they say it was?"

"Mr. Brown—Mr. Joseph Brown."

"But that's on the contract. There is no great news in that."

"No; but they describe his appearance, and it coincides exactly with that of old Mr. Surtees."

"He went openly, then, and without disguise? What an old ass!"

"Apparently so; and all you will have to do is to take Hildey Stumper to Waldo's, and see whether he can identify the cashier."

"Right you are," remarked Faske, with the air of a man who doesn't want to be taught his business. "But there is no hurry for that. I don't expect Surtees will run away, or he would have gone before this. The first thing is to get on the track of the bonds, and so I'll be off to Benoliels'—Bartholomew Court, I think. By the way, did Stumper say what was the date of the sale?"

"Yes," said Mr. Limming, referring to a slip of paper, "the thirteenth of May was the day on which they parted with the bonds. There, now, you know all about it."

Ten minutes later Mr. Faske entered the palatial premises of the Brothers Benoliel, two Jew stock-jobbers of colossal wealth, who did a gigantic business with all manner of people from princes to peddlers, all over the world. Mr. Reuben was out. So said the managing clerk, a smooth-faced little Jew, very young as it seemed for his place, but who had learned to deal with money long before he was breeched. Mr. Reuben was out, and Mr. Jehoram was in South America arranging a little matter of ten millions for a newly constituted republic.

"Anything I can do?" asked the clerk.

"Well, yes, Mr. Davies, if I can have a private word with you."

They went into a little inner room lighted by a skylight, and having all the appearance of an exaggerated iron safe. There the detective told his business.

"It's a simple matter enough," said Mr. Davies, when he had taken notes of names and dates. "Just wait one moment, while I refer to the books."

Then he left Mr. Faske, outwardly imperturbable, but secretly consumed with the keenest anxiety.

"Here you are," said the clerk, soon reappearing, and Mr. Faske's heart gave a bound of joy. "On the 13th of May last there was a transaction with Higgins and Stumper. We bought fifty £20 bonds Portuguese, at 52½, delivered same day for cash."

"Well, well; go on!" cried Mr. Faske, breathless with excitement; "and the numbers, have you any record of them?"

"To be sure we have. They were consecutive, fifty of them, from 22,945 to 22,994."

"Copped, by Jingol!" shouted Faske, springing to his feet, and

slapping his hand on his thigh. But the detective soon mastered his excitement and went on with his business.

"You could swear, I suppose, to the purchase of these bonds from Higgins and Stumper on that particular day?"

"Certainly. They are people we do not often deal with, and I can see no other transaction with that firm for at least three weeks before, and not even then in Portuguese."

"How came you to go to them, may I ask?"

"We didn't. They came to us. They had paid cash for the bonds, and wanted to realize their value at once. We took them because it happened just then that we had a large order to execute for a client of ours."

"Then you have not got the bonds still?"

"Is it likely, Mr. Faske? Jobbers don't always buy stock to keep, or where would our profits be?"

"But you know what became of them, I suppose?" asked Mr. Faske, anxiously, as though the clew was beginning to evade him again.

"Yes, here is the entry, 'Twenty-five thousand Portuguese sold to J. Guggenheimer.' The bonds you are after were amongst them."

"Then I had better go to Guggenheimer to see what he did with them?"

"That will be your best plan. I will give you a line if you like—unless you know him; you don't, eh?—to explain your visit."

Faske thanked the clerk, took the letter, and presently found himself closeted in the back parlor of a pawnbroker's shop in Houndsditch. There was a suspicious look about the place which did not impress the detective very favorably. He was not admitted without some parley, and, although he had told the clerk at Benoliel's that he did not know Mr. Guggenheimer, it was very evident that that gentleman knew him. When he reached the inner penetralia of the premises it was plain that they had been recently swept and garnished in his honor, and old Guggenheimer, who had put on his best coat to receive him, cringed and bowed low.

"An old 'fence,' I expect," said Faske to himself. "They know me, and they are not on the square."

"What can I do for you, Mishter Faske? You come from—" and the old gentleman held Mr. Davies's letter in his hand, evidently expecting his visitor to say that he came from Benoliel's, but Faske replied abruptly that he came from Scotland Yard, and it was evident that Mr. Guggenheimer did not like the name.

"I have done nothing wrong, 'shelp me. Why can't your police leave us quiet people alone?"

"Who said you had? Although I'll bet you have been up to some plant, because you are so gallows civil." Faske had assumed the bullying tone so characteristic of the London policeman when dealing with suspected persons.

"But you're safe enough this journey, if you will only tell me what I want to know. You bought about the middle of last month."—Faske ostentatiously took out his pocket book, consulted it leisurely, and slowly went on—"bought twenty five thousand Portuguese bonds from Messrs. Benoliel?"

"Isb that all? Why couldn't you say so at first? What do you come here and startle quiet folk for? That was a straight job, all open and on the square."

"What did you do with the bonds?"

"Do with them? Passed them on to their owner, to be sure."

"And you didn't buy them for yourself?"

"What me pay a matter of £12,000 to £13,000 for foreign shtock. Why, where could I get the money?"

"You are not worth as many pence, I suppose," dryly observed Faske. "Trade must be rather dull, then, or perhaps some of those late robberies did not come in your way."

"Mr. Faske," said Guggenheimer, rising from his chair, and speaking with dignity; "there is nothing against me and never was. Such charges as these amont to defamation, and I won't have you talk to me so—here in my own place. Is there anything more you want to know?"

"Come, don't get angry. I was only joking. You say you passed the bonds on to their owner. May I ask his name?"

"The person I bought 'em for—Cornelius Van Zandt, of Amsterdam."

"Amsterdam?" cried Mr. Faske, springing up from his chair. "These cursed bonds, shall I ever get hold of them? What is Mr. Van Zandt's address?"

"Muiderstraat, No. 97; a most respectable man and enormously rich."

"I will just step over to Amsterdam," said Mr. Faske to himself, "and try to get a sight of Mr. Van Zandt or the bonds."

That same night, after telegraphing to the police at Amsterdam, he went down to Harwich, crossed to Holland, and by noon next day had disembarked from the Rotterdam train in the Rhine railway station at Amsterdam.

He was just a little confused and out of his element, but he surrendered himself to the first tout, a ragged, disreputable-looking Jew, who agreed to escort him to the Muiderstraat, to the residence of Mynheer Van Zandt.

No. 97 was only a small shop front, that of a dealer in curiosities, who was either in a very small way of business or did not care to make much show.

"Mynheer Cornelis!" cried the guide, introducing the visitor to a wizened old man in a black velvet cap, who might have stepped straight out of a picture by Holbein or Gerard Douw. "English gentleman."

Mynheer Van Zandt made Faske a low bow, then turned suddenly on the guide, and in a few fierce words ordered him to leave the shop.

"Don't want him or any like him here," went on the old man to Faske in very fair English; "I deal straight—first hand."

"Mr. Guggenheimer sent me," began Faske, cautiously.

"What have you got? Diamonds? precious stones? I'll give you the best price; no questions asked. Quick, let me see!"

The old dealer's eagerness convinced the detective that the shop in the Muiderstraat was in connection with that in Houndsditch, and that Mr. Van Zandt was quite ready to do business in stolen property if it was only made worth his while.

"I've nothing to sell," said Faske, bluntly. "I only want to ask you a question about some property."

"Whose property? I have no property here except what's my own. Whose property, I say?" The old dealer's manner was no longer encouraging.

"You bought a lot of Portuguese stock the other day?"

"Well, what if I did? I paid for them. Mayn't I buy what I please?"

"Some of them were stolen."

"Stolen!" shrieked the old Jew. "And you want me to give them up? By the blessed Pentateuch, young man, you've come to the wrong shop."

"I want to look at them, for a moment only, to verify the numbers; nothing more."

"Yah. I know you. You're a police officer. I could swear to you a mile off. Go along! I shall show no bonds. I have none."

"Guggenheimer will swear he sent them to you," went on Faske, hotly.

"What do I care? I needn't criminate myself. What if I didn't keep them? Anyhow I bought them. They're mine, honestly mine. I won't part with them, or show them, or have anything more to say to you. Go away."

The old man was gradually working himself into a fury.

"I shall go to the police of this city and claim their help."

"You won't get it, then. They know me far too well; I am a decent burgher; since I was born I have lived here, and they will all be on my side, the councilors, and the burgomaster, and the police. Go away, go away, go away!" and Mynheer Van Zandt, fairly shrieking with rage, drove Mr. Faske out of his shop.

With a heavy heart the detective went to the Staat House, and asked for help from the law. But he could make out no case. What if the bonds in Van Zandt's possession had been stolen in England? Could he show that the Mynheer had stolen them? No? Who had? All Faske could say was that he suspected some one in England, but Van Zandt was not implicated in the least.

The officials of Amsterdam shrugged their shoulders, and Mr. Faske went back to London a disappointed man. He had tracked his bonds; had run them to earth; and yet they must remain buried quite beyond his reach. He could not even subpoena their holders to produce them in an English court.

He seemed further off the *denouement* than ever, but tenacious as a limpet he stuck still to his quarry. Whatever might come of the case, whether Mr. Surtees was run in or not, Mr. Faske was resolved to know who had sold the bonds to Higgins and Stumper, even if he ran the risk of failure in trying to identify the cashier.

Accordingly he waited on the partners at the bank, to put the whole case before them. They agreed—Mr. Dandy directly, Mr. Waldo with more reluctance—to allow Faske, accompanied by Mr. Hildebrand Stumper, to take post outside the bank, just as the *employés* entered it. From a secure but unseen point of inspection every one was seen by them.

"There he goes!" said Hildy Stumper; "that's Mr. Brown; that old gentleman with the curly white whiskers and the iron-gray hair."

"Mr. Surtees, of course," said Mr. Faske. "I never had a shadow of doubt of it. It was he who sold the bonds. To think that one is so near the end, and yet miss a conviction! It's heart-rending. I sha'n't end here, I swear! My professional reputation is at stake, and I must run him in. I wonder whether that Meggitt can help me any more?"

As the drowning man catches at the straw, Mr. Faske hunted up the assistant-cashier.

"Thanks to the information I got from you, I have traced the bonds," he said, in an off-hand way.

"All of them?"

"Not quite. But enough to convict Mr. Surtees and to spare."

"Where are the rest?"

"That's what I want to know. Nothing more to tell us, have you, eh?"

"I? Not a syllable. How can I, unless you let me know exactly what you've done?"

Mr. Faske felt that further secrecy would be misplaced, and he explained minutely to Meggitt all that had happened since they had last met.

"I should apply for a search-warrant now," suggested the assistant-cashier. "You have enough evidence against Mr. Surtees. When you get the warrant, arrest him and ransack his office desk at the same time."

"Shall we find anything there?"

"That's more than I can tell you; but you might, and it's surely worth trying."

"You're right, Mr. Meggitt. By Jove, I'll do it! As I've said before, you'd have been a credit to the force."

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. WALDO'S MAID.

MRS. WALDO was heartily sick of her amateur theatricals long before the night of the performance. They turned the Rookery upside down, just when she wanted to live in it; they developed too close an intimacy between her daughters and Mr. and Mrs. Bonastre; and worse than all, through them Bob Surtees and his sister had gained far too familiar a footing in the house. She had never liked any of the Surtees family. Old Mr. Surtees, as a contemporary of her husband's, reminded her of the days when the partner was still only a clerk, and when Waldo and she were at the bottom, not the top, of the social ladder. She had still stronger reasons for personally disliking both brother and sister. Mrs. Waldo was an ambitious woman, and naturally eager that her daughters should marry well. It seemed as if Clara had really had

a chance at one time of securing Sir Richard Daunt. But it was still more certain that she had been interfered with, if not quite cut out, by Josephine Surtees. Clara, wild with jealousy and despair, brought back to her mother many malicious, highly colored stories from Kew of the bold, barefaced way Josephine and Sir Richard went on; and Mrs. Waldo grew very wroth at the telling.

"That girl ought never to have been asked to play. Can't you get rid of her?" inquired Mrs. Waldo, indignantly.

"If we did, Mr. Surtees would not play either, and we can not do without him," replied Clara; adding, maliciously, "at least so Helena says."

"Helena!" cried Mrs. Waldo, waxing furious. "Is it possible that there is anything between him and that foolish girl?"

"I will know," went on Mrs. Waldo, when Clara shook her head and remained demurely silent—"I will know at once. If there is anything it must be put an end to before it has gone too far."

Then she resolved to transfer her residence to the Rookery, notwithstanding its discomforts.

The day on which Mrs. Waldo decided to go down to Kew was that fixed for the dress rehearsal. The piece was the burlesque *Aladdin*. The whole strength of the company was present, and the fun promised to be fast and furious. The curtain had gone up, and the play had begun, when Bob Surtees—he was to play the Widow Twankay—came out of his dressing-room in the wing, and, quite by accident of course, met *Aladdin*—Helena Waldo—on her way down-stairs.

They surveyed each other with astonishment and delighted laughter. Bob was gigantic in petticoats, and had artfully contrived to give himself the appearance of great height. Helena, on the contrary, looked a merry, mischievous little boy.

"My child! my child!" cried Bob, opening his arms; and, before Helena well knew what he would be at, he had given her two sonorous kisses, one on each cheek.

At that moment, a figure came out of Mrs. Waldo's bedroom, which lay on this side, overlooking the garden, and was close to the spot where Bob and Helena had met.

"We are observed!" cried Helen, disengaging herself quickly. "Oh, Bob! how could you do such a thing? She caught us nicely."

"Who was it?"

"Fanchette, the 'mum's' French maid."

"What is she doing down here?"

"I can't think. I suppose the 'mum' is coming. Fanchette generally precedes her."

"Do you think she saw?"

"If she didn't she heard, and I don't trust her a bit. She's sure to tell."

"Pooh! I'll give her a tip to hold her tongue."

Mlle. Fanchette had made herself indispensable to her mistress. Mrs. Waldo called her, and thought her, a perfect treasure. The clever, neat-handed Frenchwoman was a thorough adept at her business—well-trained and skillful in every line.

The rest of the family were a little in awe of Fanchette. They all quailed before Fanchette's fierce eyes and glittering white teeth. There was a hardness about her mouth, with its faint hue of soft black down, and a set look in her colorless face, which warned those who did not know her to be on their guard. Yet she was not ill-favored, and, true Frenchwoman, knew how to make the best of such attractions as she possessed. Although scrupulously simple in her attire, which was invariably black, there was a touch of coquetry in its very simplicity. The plain dress fitted her neat, slight figure with absolute perfection. Its straight skirts were cut short and showed her small feet, always as admirably shod as they deserved. There was a certain decorative charm in the snow-white collars and cuffs, and in the small, smart cap which lay lightly against the twisted coils of her coal-black hair.

The thought that this redoubtable person had surprised them in their billing and cooing rankled in Helena's mind, and she told Bob directly the rehearsal was over that they must at all costs seal Fanchette's tongue.

"If she told the 'mum'—oh, dear! it would be dreadful! I believe the theatricals would be stopped, and she'd turn you out of the house."

"Oh, leave it to me," said Bob, with assurance. "Let's go and find Fanchette."

Helena led the way, and the two went upstairs just as they were; he in the garb of the Widow, Helena as the boy Aladdin. On the landing she paused to listen at her mother's door, and then looked in.

"Fanchette's in there," she whispered, "alone, I think; come along."

"Fanchette, we wanted to ask you," pleaded Helena, "to be so good as to forget that—"

"That little affair on the staircase," went on Bob, with a portentous wink, which was irresistibly comic on his painted face; at the

same time he managed to slip half a sovereign into the lady's maid's hand.

She received the coin, and, with an unmoved face, said:

"Monsieur is a *galant homme*, and I should be sorry to give mademoiselle pain."

"You will promise to hold your tongue then? I knew you would—" and Helena was on the point of giving the French maid a kiss when a voice at the door called out abruptly: "Fanchette! Fanchette!"

"*Tiens!*" cried the maid; "it is madame. Run, run. *Mon Dieu*, if she should find you here. Run."

Helena, without another word, caught Bob's hand and rushed to an inner door which communicated with Mr. Waldo's dressing-room. They had barely entered this before Mrs. Waldo was in her own room.

"Who was that?" she asked quickly of her maid. "Surely I caught sight of a skirt. Have any of my daughters been here?"

Mlle. Fanchette appeared much confused, but she shook her head vigorously.

"Go on, ma'mzelle; tell me directly, who was it? But there—I can see for myself."

But the dressing-room was empty, and Mrs. Waldo came back to the maid.

"I will know. Quick!"

Fanchette was wise enough to yield to her mistress in small things, and she was ready now with an answer.

"I have but just entered myself, when I saw some one leave your room in a hurry. I think it was—"

"Yes, yes. Who?"

"Miss Surtees."

What prompted the woman thus to put the sister in her brother's place? Did she feel bound to screen Bob now she had taken his bribe? If so, why at his sister's expense?

"I never heard of such effrontery. Miss Surtees enter my bedroom! It's really a most surprising piece of impertinence."

Mrs. Waldo fretted and fumed about the room for the next hour. She could not leave the subject. The matter must be sifted to the bottom. Mr. Waldo must exercise his authority over the cashier. The Surteeses must be forbidden the house.

When she conveyed her wishes to her husband that night he seemed strangely reluctant to take any action. It was unnecessary, he thought; the thing would settle itself. Perhaps Fanchette had

made some mistake. It must have been one of the other servants. What could bring Miss Surtees to that part of the house?

"That's more than I can tell at present. But I am determined to find out, Mr. Waldo, with or without your help. It is my belief that these Surteeses are a disreputable lot."

Mr. Waldo put up his hand in deprecation of this sweeping remark. Yet what could he say? Only that afternoon he had yielded on the point of the search-warrant, and Mr. Surtees's desk and drawers at the office, if necessary his house at Chiswick, were to be fully examined whenever the police felt so disposed.

CHAPTER X.

RUN IN!

THE burlesque was an immense success; every one was talking about it; every one wanted to go to the next performance at Kew. It was with supreme satisfaction that Mrs. Waldo surveyed her guests at the second and third performances. At last a crowd of "swells," of princes, potentates, and powers, were gathered together under her roof.

No one in this august company took much notice of Mrs. Waldo. On arrival, they bowed to the first lady who might be supposed to be the mistress of the house, and often were quite wrong. Then they passed into their seats in the theater and conducted themselves after the manner of the best society at all public performances. In other words, they carried on their talk, laughed loudly, and made merry, without considering that their voices were often louder than those of the actors, all of whom they criticised audibly in the most candid fashion.

"Who's that beautiful girl?" some one asked. And all consulted their satin play-bills as Josephine made her entrance.

"*'The Genius of the Ring--Miss Surtees.'*"

"Surtees! Surtees!" said a late arrival. "That's queer!"

"What do you mean?" asked his nearest neighbor.

"Who are these Waldos? City people, aren't they?"

"Certainly; they've got a till of some kind in the East. Rich as Rothschilds, I believe."

"I thought so. But this name of Surtees—it's an extraordinary coincidence. That's why I asked."

The gossip was pressed to explain.

"You'll find it in all the evening papers. I got one as I came down. Look here."

There, in the second edition of the "Globe," displayed in large type, was the announcement of the robbery at Waldo's bank, and the arrest of a bank cashier.

"Surtees, you see—Robert Surtees is the name of the thief. These must be his belongings."

"They're his children—that's all."

"Poor things!"

In order to explain the paragraph in the "Globe," it is necessary to describe what had occurred that morning at the bank.

Soon after eleven A.M. Mr. Dandy, the senior partner, had come in. He was presently followed by Mr. Faske, whose appearance was now pretty well known in the establishment. Meggitt winked, and Mr. Surtees, who was in his own little glass room, glanced up nervously at the detective as he passed through.

Mr. Waldo, who was waiting in the bank parlor, shook hands with Mr. Dandy, and invited the police officer to sit down.

"Thank ye, sir," replied the detective, briefly. "Perhaps we had better get to business. Will you send for your cashier?"

"You are determined, then, to proceed to extremities?" asked Mr. Waldo, looking very unhappy.

Mr. Faske turned to the senior partner as though appealing for support.

"Really, Waldo, we have no alternative I think," said Mr. Dandy, in a dry, hard voice. "The facts which Mr. Faske has brought to light, taken in connection with the other circumstances, afford a presumption, a very strong presumption—"

"That Mr. Surtees did the trick," interrupted the detective; "I'm as certain of it as that I'm standing here. But if he's to be run in we mustn't waste time. He's had more than enough already to 'sling the swag.'"

"Eh?" inquired Mr. Waldo, innocently.

"To conceal any damaging papers, that's what I mean. Shall we get on?"

"Mr. Dandy, in reply, rang the bell.

"Mr. Surtees," he began, speaking very slowly, when the cashier came in, "it will be in your memory that some weeks ago a large parcel of bonds—Portuguese bond—were abstracted—ahem—lost from the strong-room of the bank."

"Yes; unfortunately, I remember it only too well," stammered Mr. Surtees.

"You remember, too, that at that time you, with Mr. Walde, had the custody of the keys of the strong room?"

Mr. Surtees bowed.

"Before you go any further," again interrupted Mr. Faske, "it is right that Mr. Surtees should be told he need not answer any questions unless he likes. Whatever he says now will be taken down, and may be used against him by and by."

Mr. Surtees turned very pale as he realized the meaning of this formula.

"Is it possible, gentlemen, that you still suspect me?" he began.

"I am afraid we have very good grounds," replied Mr. Dandy, gravely.

Faske put up his hand as though to check any indiscretion, and said, abruptly,

"I have a search-warrant against you, Mr. Surtees. Will you give me your keys? I mean the keys of your desk and drawers here." And, as the cashier seemed to hesitate, he went on—"If you do not I shall break open the locks. The warrant authorizes us, you understand."

Mr. Surtees, without a word of protest, surrendered his keys.

"The search must be made in your presence and that of competent persons. Perhaps you two gentlemen will assist?" Mr. Faske bowed to the partners, who led the way to the cashier's room.

Mr. Surtees worked at a high desk of the conventional pattern. On each side of the seat were drawers, some locked, some open, many of them crammed with papers, old letters, and other litter, for the cashier was not very methodical in his habits, and this rubbish was the accumulation of years.

The detective hunted high and low, turned over every bundle, read religiously, and examined every scrap; but after an hour's work he was compelled to confess that so far he had drawn blank.

"We shall have to try the house at Chiswick," he said to himself. "I was wrong to suppose that the man would keep anything important here. But have I looked at everything I wonder?" And with that Mr. Faske cast his eyes slowly over every corner of the room.

"That tin-box, Mr. Surtees—a deed-box, I think—what does that contain, eh?"

"Law-papers, mostly, and documents of a private nature," said Mr. Surtees.

"Aha! which is the key, pray?" And Mr. Faske opened the box, from which he took out a dozen or more of those unmistakable bundles engrossed by the law stationer and tied up with red tape.

"Mostly law-papers, as you say. But there are securities also, I observe?"

"My own private property."

"Your own, eh? So you held Portuguese of your own, Mr. Surtees? Strange coincidence!"

And as the detective spoke he handled with admirable self-possession a parcel of bonds of the same character as those which had been missed.

"Yes; those are my own. I bought them years ago to hold as an investment, as I can prove."

Mr. Faske made no reply, but with a short nod to the two partners walked back to the bank parlor, carrying the parcel of bonds in his hand. Joy was in his face as he sat down, crossed his right leg over his left, and for just one moment took counsel with his shoe-strings, while the partners, who had followed him, waited for him to speak.

"Well?" asked Mr. Dandy at last.

"The chain of evidence is complete. These bonds are part of those stolen. See—the numbers correspond. There are one hundred of them—22,995 to 23,094."

"Surely. Waldo, after this," said Mr. Dandy, "you can have no doubt about Surtees? Beyond all question the miserable man is guilty."

"What shall you do now?" asked Mr. Waldo, nervously.

"Take him to the Mansion House and apply for his committal; the case is perfectly clear. He will be sent to the House of Detention at Clerkenwell, and bail refused. If you have nothing more to say, gentlemen, I think I'll go!"

Mr. Faske nodded airily to the partners, went out, and whispered a few words to the cashier. Mr. Surtees turned very white, but, without reply, rose and followed the detective officer out of the bank. They both entered a cab at the door, and it was driven away.

By three that afternoon Mr. Surtees was lodged in Clerkenwell Prison, on remand.

This was the dire intelligence which had now to be broken to his children. It was not strange that old Waldo, who came down on purpose to Kew, shrunk from the task.

For some time he looked round in vain for the two young people, both for the moment were on the stage.

Presently Josephine came off, having said her say. Mr. Waldo went up to her at once.

"My dear," he began, in such a kindly, compassionate tone that Josephine, who had never exchanged a dozen words with the great man, felt sure that his condescension covered some evil news. "Your father, my dear," went on Mr. Waldo, "has sent me to tell you—"

"My father! It's something dreadful, I'm sure," said Josephine. "Is he dead? Tell me. Do not keep me in suspense."

At that moment a passer-by blurted out what Mr. Waldo was trying to conceal.

"It's all in the evening papers, I tell you, and a bad case, too. The man's name is Surtees. He stole the bonds from the bank, and they've locked him up."

For a moment Josephine stared aghast at the speaker, then she hurried across to where Bob was now standing laughing and talking with Helena Waldo.

"Come home, Bob," she whispered, hoarsely. "This is no place for us—come home, come home."

"What does it all mean?" he asked in utter bewilderment, as they hurried away from the house.

Josephine could hardly bring herself to repeat the infamous charge. "They say that father has robbed the bank."

"Oh, Josephine, there must be some terrible mistake."

"I can't understand it. But it's all in the papers, they said—the name and all," Josephine sobbed out.

It was not until they reached Chiswick that they got within the radius of the evening news, and ascertained exactly what had occurred. Mr. Surtees was already actually in jail.

As they entered the empty, desolate house Josephine, now realizing her father's absence for the first time, and the cause of it, fairly broke down.

She was still crying as though her heart would break when a loud ring was heard at the front door.

"Who can it be?" asked Bob.

"Some message, perhaps, from father," said Josephine, hastily, drying her eyes.

But then a servant opened the door and introduced—

"Sir Richard Daunt."

"I came on the moment I heard," said the young baronet,

speaking in a quick, excited voice. "I thought I might be of some use, perhaps."

"Are you aware what has occurred; exactly?" asked Josephine, anxiously.

"In a vague way. That is why I came. You see I know all about these things—about"—"police and prisons" he would have said, but the words seemed harsh—"about the law; and if you will let me I will gladly help."

"We must go to him at once," said Josephine, with decision. "He will want to see us."

"Where is Clerkenwell Prison?" inquired Bob, innocently.

"I know," said Sir Richard. "We can get there by the Metropolitan Railway. It's a little late for visiting, but perhaps the governor will admit us under the circumstances."

"You will come with us?" said Josephine, as she looked at Sir Richard, gratefully.

"To be sure I will. First of all let Bob get a few things together in a dressing bag; your father will need them—and," he whispered, as Bob left the room, "you'd better wash your face." It still wore its theatrical rouge.

"There will be many things to see to," he went on, "and I have no doubt I can help. It will be necessary to secure the best legal advice. Have you thought of that?"

"I hardly understand—I feel quite dazed," replied Josephine, blankly. "I only know that your great kindness overcomes me, and that I can not express all the gratitude I feel."

"It is at times of great trial such as this that you should be able to count upon your friends," said the young man, gravely, and with great self-restraint.

"I think—I feel sure that you are a true friend, Sir Richard," and Josephine frankly put her hand into his, as if to prove the sincerity of her words.

"Friend!" he cried, as he drew the sweet girl toward him. "Friendship is but a cold word to express all that I feel toward you. Believe me, Miss Surtees, Josephine—"

"Don't, please don't," she pleaded, with crimson cheeks. "Not now. I must not listen to you."

"But I may speak again—by and by, when this black cloud has disappeared? You will not send me away then?"

The answer was almost inaudible, but Richard Daunt interpreted it in the way he wished.

"My darling!" he whispered, as he stooped down and kissed

her solemnly on the lips, "I can wait. Meanwhile we will share this terrible trouble together. My love shall support and strengthen you; yours will arm and encourage me to spare no effort in your behalf."

"Hush! Please let me go; here is Bob," and Josephine, hastily disengaging herself, ran from the room.

Half an hour later brother, sister, and stanch friend reached the gloomy gates of the prison known as the House of Detention, and after some difficulty obtained permission to enter the jail.

They were escorted to a cell, where the warder unlocked a trap in the door, to which there was an inner grating of perforated zinc, and through this they descried the unfortunate cashier.

A very painful scene followed. Mr. Surtees was greatly agitated.

"I am innocent as the child unborn," he protested, speaking in a broken voice, as though overcome by the shame of his position.

"Dearest father, do you think we doubt it?" cried Josephine; "we know you have been grievously wronged."

"It shall be rectified, rest assured," added Sir Richard.

"Appearances may be against me, but they can, they must, be explained away," went on Mr. Surtees.

"It is some infamous plot against your good name," said Bob, hotly. "Only let me find out the villains—"

"Trust to us," said Sir Richard, as the visit drew to a close. "everything possible shall be done. Your son and daughter allowed me to accompany them to-night because they know that I share their deep distress. You have my most sincere sympathy, believe me, in this great trial."

"You are too good, Sir Richard. I can never thank you sufficiently. You will prove a stanch champion, I feel sure," said the poor prisoner.

Bob and Josephine echoed these expressions of gratitude; then, with many assurances of affection, and of faith in his innocence, they left their father in his cell.

In the days following they had many more interviews with Mr. Surtees. Sir Richard, too, came frequently, alone, or with the solicitor to whom, after much thought, he had intrusted the case.

This was Mr. Levi Liljearth, a gentleman of Hebrew extraction, who had made a great name and a substantial fortune in Old Bailey practice. He was a thorn in the side of every police magistrate, and had more than once, by his astute devices, upset the most elaborate Treasury prosecutions.

But whenever Mr. Liljearth was employed it was understood that the case, taken on its merits, was weak.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CASHIER'S TRIAL.

ONLY three weeks elapsed between the full committal of Mr. Surtees for trial and his arraignment at the Central Criminal Court.

The case attracted much attention. Little doubt existed really in the public mind as to Mr. Surtees's guilt. The prisoner and his friends must have themselves thought the case a black one, or they would not have intrusted it to Mr. Levi Liljearth.

Listeners, who heard the solicitor-general unfolding the case gradually and in a masterly manner, felt that there was little hope for the prisoner.

As the reader is already in possession of all the facts elicited by Faske, it is needless to describe the cashier's trial at any length.

Mr. Waldo, who was very nervous and discomposed, swore to the disappearance of the bonds. He was certain that they were in the strong-room. He had seen them there, and had certainly not touched them himself. The clerks sometimes stayed at the bank after hours, late in the day even, but only he and Mr. Surtees had access to the strong-room. They entered it together on the morning of the 11th of May, when the loss was discovered.

"By whom?" asked the solicitor-general.

"By me. I called the prisoner's attention to the fact. He seemed surprised."

"Did he say anything?"

"Only that it was very strange, I think, or something to that effect."

Then Mr. Waldo went on to explain the steps taken when the loss was fully established, and this was the substance of his evidence.

Mr. Sergeant Standaloff, Q.C., retained for the defense, was a pillar of strength to Mr. Levi Liljearth. He was a small man with a big head, and a tongue which, when he was silent, was too big seemingly for his mouth. It hung outside, and just before he began to speak he used it freely to lubricate his lips. He had a great square nose and very prominent teeth, all of which, with the aforesaid tongue, gave him the look, as he rose to cross-examine, of a fierce dog about to quarrel over a bone.

He had long noted Mr. Waldo's nervousness, and hoped to turn it to his own client's account. But he began most blandly:

"How long have you known the prisoner?"

"Thirty years. We were clerks together in the bank."

"You trusted him?"

"Implicitly."

"You had no reason, in fact, to do otherwise?"

"No; his conduct and his character have always been irreproachable."

"How long has he been cashier?"

"Six years."

"During which time he has had one of the keys of the strong-room?"

"Yes; and I had the other."

"Nothing has ever been missed before?"

"Nev—" began Mr. Waldo. "I beg your pardon—once, about two years ago. Some Russians. 1700 1868 bonds."

"Oh! Did you suspect any one then?"

"We never went so far. The bonds were found next day."

"Where?"

"In—one of my own drawers."

"Really. How strange!"

"I had taken them out inadvertently, I presume, and forgot the circumstance."

Mr. Solicitor rose to protest against this line of cross-examination. It was going too far. Did his learned brother mean to insinuate that the banker had stolen his own bonds?

Sergeant Standaloff licked his lips freely. "My object is plain, m' lud. I desire to convey to the jury that if these Russian bonds were removed the Portuguese might have been removed too."

"It is an insinuation against Mr. Waldo," protested the solicitor-general. "Why should he remove, convey, or, in other words, misappropriate, his own property? or, if he did, what harm?"

"None in the least. But by removing these Russians from the strong-room, where they were safe, to the drawer in his desk they ceased to be safe. Anybody might have taken them. The same might have happened to the Portuguese. That is my point."

"I am not disposed to interfere," said the judge. "It will be for the jury to decide how far the suggestion has weight."

"Well, now, Mr. Waldo," went on Sergeant Standaloff, "we'll say no more about the Russian bonds. I want to ask you a ques-

tion or two about your key—the strong room key. Where do you carry it?”

“Here, on my watch-chain.”

“Always?”

“Invariably.”

“You and it never part company, in fact?”

“Never. It is an old habit. I always wear my watch.”

“And at night—where do you wear it?” (A laugh.)

“Under my pillow.” (Renewed laughter.)

“And no one could tamper with it; not even your wife?”

“We occupy different rooms.”

“Do any of the servants have access to your bedroom when you are not in bed—before you are dressed, I mean, in your bath, you know, and so forth?”

“Not that I am aware of.”

“Your valet, say?”

“I have no valet.”

“In fact, your bedroom is absolutely private to yourself. No one enters it but yourself while you are in it, or before you leave it for good, that is to say? No one; you are quite sure?”

“Fanchette has sometimes brought me a message from my wife.”

“Oho! Fanchette has brought you a message from your wife. Who, pray, is Fanchette?”

“Mrs. Waldo’s maid.”

“Why did you not tell me this before?”

“I never thought—”

Here the solicitor-general again interposed, and objected to the question.

Sergeant Standaloft insisted.

“The point is the custody of a key which gives access to a treasure-chest or strong-room. Is this always in safe keeping? I have elicited, I submit, that it is not. It might have been removed or tampered with by this Fanchette.”

“There is not a particle of evidence in support of this assumption,” retorted Mr. Solicitor.

“We propose to call Mademoiselle Fanchette,” said Sergeant Standaloft. “That will do, Mr. Waldo. I have done with you!”

After this there were doubts in the court whether the case was so clear against Mr. Surtees after all.

But the hopes that were raised in Mr. Surtees’s favor by the cross-

examination of Mr. Waldo died away when Faske was put in the box.

The evidence given by the detective was explicit, and terribly to the point. The tattered contract was put in and exhibited to the jury. Faske described how it came into his possession, and the clew it gave him to the missing bonds. He detailed the steps taken to track them—from Higgins and Stumper to Benoliels', from the jobber's to Houndsditch, and so to Amsterdam.

"Does my learned brother," said Sergeant Standaloft, ready to contest every inch of ground, "intend to produce these bonds from Amsterdam? If not, I object to their being referred to in court."

The solicitor admitted that they could not be produced.

This temporary advantage was, however, soon nullified when Faske went on to give the result of his search in Mr. Surtees's room, and the discovery in the cashier's tin box of a parcel of bonds exactly agreeing in numbers and description with those which had disappeared.

"Just so," said Mr. Solicitor, briefly, as, with a look of triumph toward his antagonist which meant "Beat that if you can!" he sat down.

Nothing came of the cross examination of Mr. Faske. That self-possessed official was too imperturbable and his evidence too straightforward to be easily shaken.

Percy Meggitt was the next witness called. He came forward, as he told Faske, with the utmost reluctance, and it really seemed from the way he spoke that it grieved him greatly to bear testimony against the cashier.

But his evidence was very damaging, especially that part which referred to the conversation between him and the cashier as to the disposal of certain stock.

On this point the prosecuting counsel sought precise information.

"The prisoner told you he wished the stock sold quietly?"

"He did."

"Privately—in fact, secretly?"

"Privately, certainly."

"Had you any notion at that time why the prisoner wished to realize his funds?"

Meggitt faltered and looked down.

"Was Mr. Surtees embarrassed?" went on the solicitor-general.

"I am not sure. I believe— That is to say, I fancy—"

"Did not the prisoner tell you he had to pay up a large sum just then?"

"He did."

"Did he say for what purpose? A bill, was it—or a debt, or what?"

"A debt of his son's; a gambling-debt."

"He told you that—you remember?"

"Yes, perfectly."

The examination-in-chief now passed on to the picking-up of the tattered brokers' contract in Mr. Surtees's room. It was dragged out of Meggitt that the cashier was so much perturbed at the other's entrance that he tried to destroy the document, but failed. Meggitt then said that he picked it up and gave it to Faske, and his testimony against Mr. Surtees ended.

It was now Sergeant Standaloft's turn.

"How did you obtain possession of that torn contract?" he asked.

"I found it on the floor," replied Meggitt.

"Was Mr. Surtees in the room?"

"No; he had gone out in answer to a summons from Mr. Waldo."

"And you remained behind?"

"No; I went out with him."

"And then returned?"

"Yes."

"On purpose to pick up the paper; I see. What benefit would the cashier's conviction be to you?"

"To me! None that I am aware of."

"You are next on the list, assistant-cashier I believe. If there was a vacancy as cashier I presume you would succeed?"

"I really can not say. I am entirely in the hands of the firm."

"You stand well with them?"

"I hope so; but I must refer you to them."

"You would, no doubt, stand better if you helped them to convict Mr. Surtees?"

Meggitt did not answer.

"It was to show your zeal and get the credit of it that you stole—"

"Stole!" Meggitt looked at the solicitor-general for protection, who half rose to protest.

"I say 'stole' advisedly. Those pieces of paper, the remains of the brokers' contract, were not your property. You had no right to the contract. Yet you took it. What did you do with it?"

"I put it by."

"For future use—eh? And when did you give it to the detective?"

"Some weeks later."

"Of your own accord?"

"No; he forced me to surrender it. He said I should be implicated if I did not."

This was not quite what Mr. Standaloft expected, so he passed on to another branch of the cross-examination.

"You have deposed that Mr. Surtees confided to you that he had a large sum of money to pay for his son. Had you no other knowledge of the fact?"

Mr. Meggitt's assurance rather failed him at this question, and his answer was long in coming.

"Well, sir," said the sergeant, putting out his tongue, "how long do you intend to keep the court waiting? Had you no other knowledge, I repeat, of this gambling-debt?"

"I was aware of it."

"Who told you of it?"

"No one."

"Then how did you know of it? Did you see it incurred?"

"Yes," said Meggitt, but with manifest reluctance; and then it came out—that the money had been lost at Meggitt's club, by one of its guests to another, although he himself had not joined in the play.

"Who was the winner?" asked the sergeant.

"A foreign nobleman," answered Meggitt, with some swagger.

"Baron? No! Count? No! Marquis? Yes! Oh: a marquis. Indeed. Of what nationality?"

"Spanish."

"His name?"

"The Marquis de Ojo Verde."

"Is he in England now?"

"No, he has gone abroad to visit some of his estates."

"And you helped him to Mr. Surtees's money?"

"I did nothing of the kind," cried Meggitt, indignantly.

"That will do, Mr. Meggitt," said the sergeant, with some scorn, and the assistant-cashier was about to leave the box when the counsel detained him. "One word: Mr. Waldo has said that the clerks sometimes remained in the bank after hours? Did you ever so remain?"

"I? Frequently."

"Alone?"

“Alone, and with others.”

This last evidence set Sir Richard Daunt thinking. His mind was filled with vague suspicions—was Mr. Surtees the victim of some base conspiracy, some plot to ruin him and get him out of the way? But if so, why? Merely to secure Meggitt's advancement in the bank? Was that a sufficient reason? He could hardly think so. Besides, the assistant-cashier could not be certain that he would benefit by the cashier's downfall. He could not count on promotion as a matter of course.

The plot, if plot there was, must have some deeper foundation, and the mere idea brought Sir Richard's deductive faculties at once into play.

The defense set up for Mr. Surtees was ingenious but weak. It depended mainly on Mr. Waldo's admissions—first, that he had already mislaid bonds, and next, that his strong-room key might have fallen into other hands.

The cashier's own line of defense had not found favor with his lawyers. He stoutly declared that the bonds disposed of were his own property—that he had bought them years previously to hold as an investment. This assertion, made with so much persistence, was thoroughly sifted by Mr. Levi Liljearth; but there were flaws in it which the attorney could not fail to detect.

How was it that the numbers of the bonds discovered in the cashier's possession were identical with those lost from the bank? Mr. Surtees declared there must be some mistake in the bank security-book. It was kept by different hands—now by one clerk, now by another, now by the head of the firm. There was a gleam of hope in this direction, but it was extinguished when Mr. Waldo was recalled, and stated that he had himself entered the numbers of this particular parcel of Portuguese stock. Besides, Mr. Surtees's position would only have been tenable by supposing that there had been a fraudulent substitution of bonds by some person or persons, and of this there was no evidence, and indeed no suspicion.

It was still more unfortunate that Mr. Surtees, although he declared that he had bought these bonds of his through a broker, could produce no record of the transaction. He had not retained the old contract, nor had he paid for them by check. They were bought, he said, with a legacy which came to him through his deceased wife, and the money had been paid over in hard cash. He remembered the broker's name, but the man had long since given up business, and could not be found. He was either dead or he had disappeared.

These were serious flaws, indeed, and they made Mr. Liljeার্থ rather hopeless about his client's case. Serjeant Standaloft was not much more sanguine, but he snatched eagerly at the chances Mr. Waldo had given him.

Mlle. Fouchette Dumoulin was hurriedly subpoenaed, and brought down to the Old Bailey.

The French maid did not appear the least disconcerted as she stepped into the witness-box; but she only said "*Plait-il*" to the first question put to her, and her examination was conducted through an interpreter.

They could not make much of her. She was highly indignant when she was asked if she had ever gone into Mr. Waldo's room.

Before he was up? Never. It would have been impossible. Moreover, monsieur was so *matinal*, so early a riser.

"But while he was dressing, ma'm'zelle?" pursued the serjeant.

Then, certainly. Several times. Mrs. Waldo sent her with messages to ask monsieur to return soon that day. To say that madame would call for him at the bank; family matters like that, many of them; they took her to Mr. Waldo's room.

"Did you ever enter it when he was not there?"

No; it was because he was there that she went.

"You never found Mr. Waldo absent temporarily?"

Never; to the best of her recollection, never.

Cross-examined by the solicitor-general, Fanchette denied all knowledge of Mr. Waldo's watch and chain.

Had never seen them. Did not know where he kept them. Under his pillow? It was possible—she had not looked. It was not her business. What did they mean? did they think she had stolen them? She was an honest woman—an honorable woman, of decent family. It was an insult to make such a charge.

The solicitor-general reassured her, declaring that her personal character was not in question, and let her go.

After this, and the usual speeches, the judge summed up, much against the prisoner. The jury must not be led astray from the main point, viz., that the bonds had been lost, and that some of them had been found in the prisoner's possession. The prisoner could not account for it, except by stating that they were his own property. But he made no attempt to prove this by showing how he had acquired them. The sale of other bonds of the same category was another suspicious fact. As these bonds could not be produced, this fact was not sufficient for conviction; but when taken in connection with the unexplained possession of the others it must

have its weight with the jury. Then there was the urgent need for a large sum of money, as deposed to by the witness Meggitt, with the prisoner's desire to sell some stock secretly. Last of all, the facilities enjoyed by the prisoner for removing the bonds must clearly be borne in mind. He held a key of the strong-room; only one other person had the same facilities, and the defense had failed to establish that that person had mislaid, or was careless as to the custody of, his key.

No one in court was surprised that the verdict of the jury was "Guilty," and the sentence penal servitude for seven years.

Even Sir Richard Daunt was compelled to acknowledge that the evidence was strong against his friend. Either Mr. Surtees had misappropriated the bonds, or he was the victim of some infamous and dastardly conspiracy.

Was it the latter? If so, the mystery should be unraveled sooner or later—of that Sir Richard was determined.

CHAPTER XII.

A TANGLED SKEIN.

WHILE Bob, broken-hearted, and full of bitter reproaches, went to have a last interview with his father, Sir Richard Daunt made all speed to Chiswick. He had to break the news to poor Josephine, who awaited there, in sickening anxiety, the result of the trial. He had sent in his name and was at once admitted. Josephine seemed to gather from the gravity of his face that he brought bad news.

"It has gone against us then?" she said, vainly endeavoring to control her tears.

"Yes, the evidence was so strong."

"Evidencel" cried Josephine, indignantly. "Then it was false. Nothing can make me believe that my father committed this wrong."

"Believe me, Josephine"—she started slightly when he called her by her Christian name. What he had said to her, sweet and tender though it was, on that terrible night that her father had been carried to prison, had been eclipsed almost by the troubles that had followed. But now it came upon her with a sense of intense relief that a true man had offered her his love in this moment of supreme trial.

"Believe me, Josephine," he went on, "I am as convinced of his innocence as you are. Mr. Surtees has been sacrificed through some infamous plot; the mystery of which shall yet be unraveled, I swear. In the meantime—"

"What is to become of my father?" interrupted Josephine. "Is he to lie in prison until justice is done to him?"

"There is no help for that, I fear. He has been duly sentenced according to law, and the law must take its course. Let us earnestly pray that the hour of his vindication will not be long delayed. I shall spare no effort to vindicate his good name. It will be a solemn duty for all his children, and you know I count myself as one now." He put out his hand to take hers, but to his surprise Josephine shrunk from him.

"No, no," she faltered, "you must forget all that."

"Forget that you have plighted me your troth! Never!"

"It is absolutely impossible, Sir Richard Daunt. For the present everything must be at an end between us."

"I can never agree to that," retorted the young man, promptly. "Now more than ever you will need my protection and support. I will not surrender my claim. You must and shall be my wife."

There was a long silence, during which Josephine, with her face hidden in her hands, wept bitterly, while Daunt waited in great anxiety for her answer.

"No, Sir Richard," she said at length. "While this stain rests upon our family I can not be your wife. It would not be fair to you. You must not associate yourself with us. It shall never be said that Lady Daunt is the daughter of a man in prison."

"Who will dare to say anything against my wife? and when we prove that that man is innocent, as we assuredly shall, all evil tongues will be silenced forever."

"We must wait till then, Sir Richard Daunt," said Josephine, sadly but firmly. "Until my father's good name is restored I can not accept your offer."

"But you love me, Josephine?"

"I do, more and more; and that is why I refuse."

"It is hard, very hard, to submit. Your decision—although, believe me, I respect the motives which inspire it—is cruel, very cruel to yourself and me."

"The time will soon pass, dear friend. It will be one of probation and suffering perhaps, but that will make us the more anxious to hasten the end. The day my father is righted and set free I promise to become your wife."

"Such a promise is a richer guerdon than any offered to a knight of old. I will strive to win it with all my heart and soul. But I shall see you sometimes?" he went on, struck with a sudden fear that Josephine intended to bid him good-bye.

"I do not know; I can not say. It will depend, of course, on what becomes of me, and where I go."

"Have you thought at all? Have you made any plans? Your relations, will they take you in?"

"We have no near relations; but I would not stoop to ask any one for help. It is too soon to say what I intend to do, but I am resolved to work to earn an honest living somehow until my father returns."

"That must not be. It is your brother's place to find you a home."

"Bob is even less capable than I am, I fear, to earn a livelihood. Besides, I could not go and stay with him in barracks;" and, in spite of her grief, Josephine smiled slightly at the thought.

"Bob must leave the army. We must get him a situation here or in the country with a sufficient income, and then you can keep house for him."

"That would be pleasant enough; but at any rate I am ready, and resolved, indeed, to do my share."

"You will not hesitate to send to me. Promise me that," said Daunt, earnestly, "if ever you are in trouble or difficulty. It will be my only pleasure, as it will be my duty, to watch over the welfare of my future wife. You will promise me?"

"Yes," replied Josephine, simply, and she put her hand into his in proof of her sincerity. But Sir Richard Daunt would not be satisfied with such a cold acquiescence. Without a word of warning he snatched her into his arms and covered her with kisses. This brief love-passage was barely ended before Bob came in. He arrived straight from the Old Bailey armed with his father's instructions, and was prepared then and there to talk over the arrangements for the future. They made no stranger of Sir Richard Daunt, although he suggested that he should withdraw.

"No, no!" said Bob. "You must not run away. We shall probably want your advice. Father says," he went on, turning to Josephine, "that this house had better be let furnished, if possible, or sold. That would give you a sufficient income for the present, unless—"

"It is like poor dear papa," said Josephine, interrupting hastily,

"to think of me first in his great trouble; but I hope I shall not want for means."

"I think I can guess!" cried Bob, looking delighted. "Something is going to happen."

"You are mistaken, Bob," interrupted Sir Richard; "your sister means—"

"Sir Richard Daunt and I understand each other," interrupted Josephine, in her turn speaking rather peremptorily. "He has had his answer, and there is an end of the matter. What do you suppose the house would fetch?" she added, in a cold, matter-of-fact voice. After which the conversation was of a purely business character.

Sir Richard Daunt did not return to his chambers in the Albany till late that evening. To his surprise he found among his letters one from Mrs. Waldo.

"What can that old devil have to say to me?" he exclaimed.

It was a note of only half-a-dozen lines, and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR SIR RICHARD,—You would be conferring a very great favor upon me if you would call and see me some time to-morrow forenoon, say about twelve. I am in very great trouble, and most anxious to consult you. It is a matter of the utmost importance to some friends of yours as well as to myself, and I should feel deeply grateful to you for your advice.

"Very sincerely yours,

"AURELIA WALDO.

"The Rookery, Kew."

"Some friends of mine? Can she mean the Surteeses? What can she have to say about them? Nothing, except to abuse them. I sha'n't go," and, full of this determination, he went to bed.

The morning brought wiser counsels. Daunt felt that he ought not to lose a single chance. Something useful might come of an interview with Mrs. Waldo. In any case he might be able to find out more about Fanchette, the French maid.

It was she who received him when he arrived at the Rookery.

"Madame expects you," was the greeting. "She told me to be on the lookout for monsieur. Will he give himself the pain to follow?"

"Mademoiselle is very good," said Daunt, in excellent French. "Mademoiselle is a Parisian, of course?"

Fanchette simpered at the compliment so dear to Frenchwomen.

"But yes, monsieur. Parisian to the finger-tips."

"I knew I might rely upon you, Sir Richard," said Mrs. Waldo,

when he was introduced. "It is most kind of you to pay such prompt attention to my request."

"May I ask in what way I can serve you, Mrs. Waldo?" inquired Sir Richard, courteously. "You referred in your note to some friends of mine who were closely concerned. Will you tell me their names?"

"I will at once. I mean those dreadful Surteeses."

"Pardon me, Mrs. Waldo," said the young baronet, very stiffly, "the Surteeses are friends of mine, really and truly, and not in the commonplace sense. I can not hear anything against them."

"You will change your opinion, I'm sure, when you hear what I have to tell. Of course you know about the father?"

Sir Richard bowed.

"Well, the girl is a thief, too."

"Mrs. Waldo!" Sir Richard's indignation was such that he almost sprung to his feet.

"I am certain of it," went on Mrs. Waldo. "As perfectly convinced as if I had seen her steal the things."

"What things, may I ask?" went on Sir Richard, striving, in Josephine's interest, to keep calm.

"Some papers, which I keep here in this room. Papers of the utmost—the deepest—importance to me; they have disappeared, like the bonds at the bank."

"Have you told Mr. Waldo?"

"No, I have not. I can not very well speak about these papers to him. They were letters—private letters—of rather a delicate nature, written at a time when—well, before I became Mrs. Waldo, you understand, and I did not wish to speak of them to him. So that is why I thought I would see you first, and try to get them back."

"See me! I am at a loss to understand how I can help you, Mrs. Waldo."

"You have influence over this girl. She is a great friend of yours. You admire her—ah, yes, Sir Richard, trust a woman for finding out such things—"

"I assure you, Mrs. Waldo, you are mistaken. It is gossip of the worst kind, scandalous gossip, which connects my name with Miss Surtees, a young lady I esteem highly, but over whom I have no influence, believe me, such as you suppose."

"Then I shall appeal to the police. The papers I must and will have back."

"Of course you have evidence in support of this charge?"

"To be sure."

"Remember, it is an accusation of the most odious kind. Unless you are quite certain of what you say, you may be doing an innocent girl an irreparable wrong. Just as—"

He stopped short. Why let Mrs. Waldo into his secret feelings with regard to the condemnation of the cashier?

"I have the best evidence—Fanchette's. She was seen here, this girl—here in my room—during the time of the theatricals. Why did she come here except for some improper purpose? Soon after that I missed the packet of letters."

"You must have more than that to go upon, Mrs. Waldo, before you accuse people of stealing," said Sir Richard, stiffly.

"But what could she have been doing in my room?"

"We had better ask her; that is to say, if she was really here."

"Fanchette found her: I myself saw the skirt of her dress as she ran out. I am certain she took the letters. They are a disreputable lot—these Surteeses."

"Has Mr. Waldo missed any shirt-studs? Hadn't you better have the forks counted? Mr. Robert Surtees has dined here more than once."

"Now you are laughing at me—and it is no laughing matter. I must recover those papers. They might do terrible mischief if they fell into the wrong hands. You will speak to Josephine Surtees, Sir Richard? Get them for me. I will pay her anything in reason."

"I would not insult Miss Surtees by repeating your odious, infamous suspicions," replied Sir Richard, sternly. "They are most unfounded, of that I have no doubt; and if you continue to persecute her I shall advise her to appeal to Mr. Waldo for protection."

And leaving Mrs. Waldo with rather a white, scared face, Sir Richard Daunt withdrew.

He walked back by Chiswick, and called in at the Mall. Josephine was at home, and Bob was with her. After some conversation upon the topic all had most near at heart, the situation of Mr. Surtees, Sir Richard tried cautiously and carefully to ascertain whether or not Josephine had entered Mrs. Waldo's bedroom at the Rookery.

"I have just been to the Waldos," he said.

"Whom did you see?" asked Bob, eager to have some news of his Helena.

"Only the old lady. How savage it would make her to hear me call her old!"

"Was she very bitter against us?" inquired Josephine.

"What she said is not worth repeating. She is a malicious, evil-disposed woman, and as wicked, I expect, as she is selfish."

"You don't spare her," said Josephine.

"Her selfishness is evident. She takes the best of everything. Her boudoir is one of the best rooms, and I have no doubt her bedroom is the same."

"Where is it?" asked Josephine, evidently in perfect good faith.

"It looks over the garden, I believe; in fact, I think it opens out from the boudoir. I could see that much. Have you ever been into it?"

"I? Never! Neither into the bedroom nor the boudoir. What should take me there? Mrs. Waldo never showed me any particular favor."

"I have seen the bedroom," cried Bob, with a wink. "It's a clipper, I can tell you."

"Have you seen it, Bob?"

"Yes, once. It may sound odd; but I'll tell you how it was."

And Bob described his hunt with Helena for Fanchette, whom they found at last in Mrs. Waldo's room.

"And Mrs. Waldo almost caught you, you say? How were you dressed?"

"In petticoats, of course, as the Widow Twankay. I dare say she saw a bit of my skirt."

Sir Richard was amazed at this discovery. It was quite clear that Fanchette had willfully brought a false accusation against Josephine.

But with what object? To divert suspicion? From whom?

Probably from herself. Fanchette had probably discovered the importance of these letters, meaning, somehow and some day, to turn their possession to her own account. Meanwhile, it would be necessary to find a scape goat, and she chose Josephine—the sister, in preference to her brother, because it would seem more natural that she should go to Mrs. Waldo's bedroom. It was safer, too, because Bob might, if accused, call upon his companion Helena to prove the innocent cause of his visit.

But why accuse either of them? Why not one of the housemaids, or some other guest?

Because the Surteeses were in trouble. Because the father was already accused of theft.

Stay—Mr. Surtees had not been arrested on that day of the dress rehearsal, and there had been no mention of the robbery outside a

very narrow clique. If Fanchette knew it, it must be in some underhand way. It looked very much as though she anticipated the arrest.

How had she learned that the cashier was to be accused of theft? Had she overheard some fragment of conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Waldo, or was she in some other way behind the scenes? The first move in unraveling the tangled skein was to set a watch upon Mlle. Fanchette.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAUSE AND EFFECT.

MR. DANDY, the senior partner, as the reader will remember, resided at Wimbledon. He was old, fond of his ease, reputed very rich, having no one, so far as the world knew, to spend his money on but himself.

This he did right royally, indulging his peculiar tastes to the full. Mr. Dandy was a *dilettante*, a connoisseur, and a collector on a large scale. His home at Wimbledon was crammed full of valuable possessions.

Here, in the midst of his priceless belongings, Mr. Dandy spent the greater part of his time, examining and enjoying them to the utmost. He was so employed on the day of Sir Richard Daunt's visit to the Rookery, and Mrs. Waldo's fruitless appeal. Mr. Dandy was, as usual, at home.

"It is a head of Bacchus. There can be no doubt of that, and the date probably the eleventh century. What is it, Barable?" he said fretfully, as his personal attendant, a discreet, middle aged man, who had been with him for a quarter of a century, entered, carrying a richly chased silver salver, the work of the Spaniard, Durté, on which was a letter. "You know I hate to be interrupted at this time of the day."

"A note, sir, marked 'very urgent,' brought over by a groom from Kew."

"From Kew!" Mr. Dandy seemed intensely surprised. Then, with a gesture of half protest, he took the note and looked at it.

"Aurelia Waldc. What can the woman have to say to me?"

"Dear Onesimus," was what she had to say, "you must come over and speak to me at once. It is serious—most serious. I shall be at home only to you."

"Bother the woman! Why can't she leave me alone? I sup-

pose she has been doing something foolish, and wants me to get her out of her scrape." Then he walked toward the writing-table, for Barable had been still standing there waiting for an answer.

"No, I won't write. People are much too fond of writing. She was, for one," he muttered; then added aloud, "Say there is no answer, but that I will call."

A couple of hours later, after his frugal lunch—for Mr. Dandy was very careful of himself—he got into his brougham, and was driven to the Rookery.

"I beg your pardon," began Mrs. Waldo, but with some hesitation; "I beg your pardon for having disturbed you so abruptly, but it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to you at once. Something very serious has happened."

"Serious to whom? To you?"

"To both of us, although the scandal, if anything comes of it, will probably fall on me."

"That is the general way of the world, my dear madam. It is a wicked world, and I am afraid we can not alter it."

"But at any rate you are bound, as a gentleman, to protect me to the utmost of your power."

"Naturally. You can command me, of course. But you have not yet told me what has occurred."

"A numbers of letters of yours to me, and mine to you—"

"Which I restored to you, you will remember, on the sole condition that you would destroy them at once."

"And which, foolishly, I kept—"

"I presume for your own purpose," he said, with a sneer.

Mrs. Waldo did not choose to understand the innuendo conveyed.

"At any rate which I kept," she said, "but in a perfectly secure place, as I thought, till now. But now I find those letters have been removed—stolen, in fact—within the last few weeks."

"My dear Aurelia, you don't say so! How inconceivably careless of you! But you women are all alike. Why on earth should you keep those letters at all? You knew how much depended on them."

"What is done can't be undone. It is no use wasting time in vain regrets. I acknowledge I was wrong. The thing is now, if possible, to remedy my mistake."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"I more than suspect. I am pretty certain I know the thief."

Then Mrs. Waldo proceeded to tell Mr. Dandy what she had already told Sir Richard Daunt.

"That is not much to go upon," said Mr. Dandy, who had listened attentively throughout. "It would be very wrong to accuse Miss Surtees on such grounds as these."

"But I tell you, Onesimus, I am certain she took them," persisted Mrs. Waldo, with all the illogical obstinacy of a frightened, angry woman.

"Whoever took them," said Mr. Dandy, "took them for a purpose—that we can safely conclude—and, having taken them, will presently show their hand."

"What do you mean?"

"That use will be made of these letters in some way or other, either to extort money from us, to levy blackmail in fact, or to get a price from the person who, after us, would be most concerned."

"Then what do you think it would be best to do?"

"Nothing much. Wait for their next move. We shall see then the quarter from which it all comes, and act accordingly. If it be this Miss Surtees, which I can not believe, there is not much to fear."

"Not much to fear! Why, she would take a profound pleasure in blackening my character."

"We could easily silence her in that case. But I do not think she's the person."

"Then you would not make any overtures to her now?" went on Mrs. Waldo, sticking still to her own interpretation of the theft.

"Certainly not. In the first place, we do not know that she has the letters. She is more probably innocent, and therefore ignorant of the whole affair. Any overtures to her would betray us. No; we must look elsewhere. But I have a better plan, I think."

"And that is—"

"Forestall the enemy. Make the secret worth nothing by conceding beforehand all or more than its possession would be likely to extort."

"Would it be safe? Suppose the reasons, or even a hint of them, crept out? I should be lost."

"You can leave it safely in my hands, Aurelia. I had always intended to do something of this kind, and what has happened lately makes it all the more easy."

"You lift a load off my heart, Onesimus. For the moment, I

thought that exposure, shame, God knows what, would be my portion."

"Pooh, pooh! You are too easily frightened. Trust to me."

And with these words Mr. Dandy who was of the old school, lifted Mrs. Waldo's hand to his lips and went his way.

The appointment of cashier remained vacant for some days after Mr. Surtees's conviction. Mr. Dandy was the first to raise the question by pointing out that the assistant-cashier, who was naturally the next for promotion, was really the most suitable person for the post.

"Where could you find higher personal character, more exemplary private life, than that of the wretch Surtees?" retorted Mr. Dandy; "yet see where they have landed him."

Mr. Waldo hesitated. "I did not like what came out at the trial about that gambling transaction," he said.

"He is young; but he knows his business and attends to it. Besides, it has always been our rule to recruit from within, and not from without."

"It is no doubt the wisest system."

"I am sure of it. Every clerk with us has the prospect of promotion to even the highest position. Your example is constantly before them. Surtees, wretched man, might have risen too; he was very near it, in fact, but he could not wait. Now, I urge Meggitt's appointment as cashier, because we must bring some one on."

"You would never make him a partner, surely?" asked Waldo, in surprise.

"Not yet, of course. But why not by and by? Do you ever look ahead, Waldo? What is to become of the bank after you and me?"

"I have not thought about it much, I confess. The simple way would be to take in partners."

"Yes. But not from outside. Let us adhere to our traditions."

"A partner should bring something in, if only as a guarantee."

"Did you? Come, Waldo, don't be illiberal."

"But I had, at least, the advantage in point of years and length of service. Mr. Meggitt is still very young."

"That is his luck. The way has been cleared for him. Surtees, but for his miserable conduct, would have been before him, and when Meggitt's turn came he would have been riper for the occasion. As it is—"

Waldo still shook his head, unconvinced.

"Surely you are prejudiced against Meggitt," went on Mr. Dandy. "What do you know of him?"

"Very little, indeed; that is my chief objection."

"I will make it my business to inquire. I will find out all about him; his private life, habits, and character. Leave that to me. I will trust to your report as to his business qualifications; his personal shall be my affair."

Before leaving the bank Mr. Dandy wrote a short note to the assistant-cashier, which both delighted and surprised Mr. Meggitt. It contained an invitation to dine at Wimbledon next day.

For the friendliness was undoubted. Meggitt's reception there was cordial in the extreme. The fellow was adroit enough, and he had learned how to please Mr. Dandy. He went into raptures over the art treasures.

"As you like such things, Mr. Meggitt, I will show you all my collections; I am rather proud of them. But by and by, for here is dinner."

It was a plain dinner, but perfect of its kind. Clear ox-tail, salmon cutlets, a small saddle of mutton, apple fritters, then soft roes on mushroom toast, and that was all.

"I live like a hermit, Mr. Meggitt," said the banker; "I'm obliged to be very particular; only one glass of champagne, but that a large one—and the best, in spite of the hard times."

"Business is very bad, sir; it won't get worse, I hope."

"I think not; at any rate, we shall escape a crisis, I trust. I don't want to see another."

"I can remember '66. It was terrible, even to a youngster, while it lasted."

"Nothing to 1825. I was a young man, too, at that time, and had only just joined the bank."

"How long did it last, sir?"

"A whole week. During forty-eight hours the strain was frightful. You couldn't realize anything, not even Consols or Exchequer bills. The Mint couldn't coin sovereigns fast enough, and the Bank of England was all but drained."

"The Bank of England was much blamed, was it not, sir? Didn't it increase its issues when the rage for speculation was at its height, then suddenly contracted them?"

"Certainly, and no doubt helped to bring about the crisis," said Mr. Dandy, looking surprised at his junior's knowledge. "You seem to have studied the subject?"

"It is my profession, sir," replied Meggitt modestly. "Bank-

ing in all its phases, historically and scientifically, has the deepest interest for me."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Dandy. "A young man ought to have his heart in his work."

Having touched on the subject of money, the talk continued to be "shoppy." One seemed anxious to find out how much the other knew, and that other, nothing loath, readily paraded his knowledge. They discussed all the great financial questions of the day, and on all Meggitt expressed himself with propriety and judgment. From reserves they passed to exchanges, and thence to discounts and investments of capital. The keen competition of these modern times was mooted, more especially that between private and joint-stock banks. Both, naturally, were in favor of their own class.

"But I hardly know what to say," Mr. Dandy observed, shaking his head rather despondingly. "They press us very close, these joint-stock concerns. They can extend their business so, while we have only an old connection. As that dies away, what are we to do?"

"Be enterprising. Strike out in a fresh line," said Meggitt with enthusiasm. "Seek more outlets; open branches, if necessary, all over the country; attract depositors, and capital, and business, generally, by offering the most liberal terms."

"You are sanguine, but that is like a young man," said Mr. Dandy, smiling. "Some day, perhaps, we may take your advice. But now let us leave the shop alone."

And then Mr. Dandy passed on to talk about Mr. Meggitt himself. When they parted that night it must have been with a conviction that the assistant-cashier always went to bed at ten, after a quiet dinner over a book, such as Hankey on the Bank of England, Capecigue on Companies, Bosanquet on Currency, or Fenn on the Funds.

At least, that is what he told Mr. Waldo next day.

"Depend upon it," he added, "we have got a treasure in that young man. He has views, enlightened, although, perhaps, venture-some views. You may be glad to listen to them some day. In any case, we can not do better at present than appoint him cashier. I am seldom wrong in my estimate of men, and I think we shall do right in pushing Mr. Meggitt on."

And thus Percy Meggitt found himself on the high road to fortune in Waldo's bank.

CHAPTER XIV.

WANTING EMPLOYMENT.

NOT long after Mr. Surtees's trial and sentence his children left the dear old house at Chiswick, which was soon let, furnished, for a term of years and settled in a Pimlico lodging. Josephine sought out and obtained by her own exertions a situation in a Bond Street shop. Sir Richard Daunt was told nothing of this. He was not to know their whereabouts even. Bob also tried, but less successfully, to obtain some employment. He wrote, too, from the club dozens and dozens of letters of inquiry and reply, made innumerable appointments and kept them faithfully, which the other side did not invariably do. Disappointment met him in all these directions.

It would be wearisome to enumerate all the queer, shady by-ways of bread-winning he explored, always without success. Was every avenue closed to him? He began to fear it and despair.

One day he had been all the way to Kilburn, again on a fruitless errand, and was sauntering idly home, when he entered, with the idea of getting some lunch, one of those second-class café restaurants, kept mostly by Italians, which are springing up in so many suburban thoroughfares.

He sat himself down at one of the tidy little tables and gave his order. While he waited to be served he looked around, and was at once attracted by a couple, male and female, who were lunching at a neighboring table, and were the only other occupants of the room. The woman's back was turned to him; it was a neat symmetrical back, in a tight, well-fitting brown silk dress, crowned by a graceful head with plenty of black hair admirably arranged.

But the man's face he saw, and soon recognized, in spite of the thick black beard which changed somewhat the look of the lower part.

It was the Marquis de Ojo Verde, dressed with his usual care, but foreign still in aspect, with a wide turned-down collar cut very open at the throat, and a huge black silk bow, of the kind Frenchmen affect, falling over a coat of rather bright blue serge.

The marquis and his companion conversed in French, a language with which Bob was not thoroughly conversant. But he could gather from occasional words that the dialogue was animated; the

lady did not seem in the best of tempers, and the marquis was trying his best to pacify her. She was "*vraiment trop exigeante*," Bob heard him say once, at which she shrugged her shoulders—they were very pretty sloping shoulders—and retorted in some sharp words he could not understand.

Neither of them seemed to be disconcerted at Bob's presence, nor indeed to have noticed his entrance.

All at once the marquis looked and caught Bob's eye. Bob winked, as much as to say, "I won't spoil sport," but the other did not acknowledge the greeting by the slightest sign of recognition.

Soon afterward the pair rose from their seats, and while the marquis paid the bill the lady turned toward a neighboring mirror to lower and adjust her veil.

Just for a second Bob caught a glimpse of her features, and taking them in connection with the neat, straight figure, and the general air of coquettish smartness, he felt certain he had seen the woman somewhere before.

But where? He could not remember at first, and in his perplexity he stared hard at the lady, as, now closely veiled, she walked out of the shop. He was still taxing his memory, to give precision to this vague recollection, when he felt a friendly tap on his shoulder, and looking round saw the marquis standing over him.

"Caught! Fairly caught!" said the Cuban nobleman. "There is, then, no secrecy, no privacy, no chance of a *déjeuner en guinguette* in this great public town of yours? Who would have thought to meet you here, respectable Mr. Surtees, in the far-off suburb of Kilburn? Did you come on purpose to discover my little *amourette*?"

"A charming person, marquis, accept my congratulations," said Bob, in the same tone; "but I think I have seen her before."

"That lady! Impossible. Where?"

"At the Rookery, Kew. At Mrs. Waldo's. You know?"

"Who is Mrs. Waldo? I have never heard the name. And where is your Rookery? Among the trees? That lady is—"

"Mrs. Waldo's French maid, Fanchette."

The marquis roared with laughter.

"A maid! a *domestique*! that lady? It is too absurd what you say. You are wrong, utterly wrong, *mon cher*; that much I may tell you, if no more. Do not press me, I beseech you; the secret is the lady's, not mine."

"I confess I only saw Mlle. Fanchette once—I should say twice,

and that was under peculiar circumstances. Still I have a good memory for faces—”

“All a mistake, *mon cher*. It is a *bon fortune*—that I will allow, but not with a lady’s-maid. What an honor; a lady’s-maid, *ma foi!*”

“It is not of much consequence, marquis,” said Bob, civilly. “Whoever it was I shall not be likely to talk about it, you may be sure.”

“Thank you, from my heart. Her grace, too—*peste*, I had nearly let the cat out of the bag. There, we will say no more about it. Have you seen your friend Meggitt lately?” he went on, as if anxious to change the conversation. “No? Nor I. I am only just returned to England, after an absence of many months. We must arrange a meeting at an early day. You will like your revenge at *écarté*, perhaps. Ah! a strange and capricious game.”

“I played it once too often, marquis,” Bob admitted, with a grave voice.

“Fortune is fickle, my friend; your turn will come. Well, *au revoir*—or stay, can I take you back to town? I have kept my hansom. Don’t say no. Positively, I insist now.” And Bob could hardly refuse an offer so courteously made.

It did not occur to him to think that the marquis was taking him back to London to prevent any pursuit of the mysterious unknown.

CHAPTER XV.

AT THE ROYAL ROSCIUS.

WHEN hope was nearly dead in him Bob Surtees heard through his sister that there was some chance of his obtaining a dramatic engagement. Josephine had met Mrs. Bonastre in Bond Street, and the kind-hearted actress had half offered to take Bob on at the Royal Roscius.

Bob went to the theater, and was at length admitted to find them all busy at rehearsal. Mr. Bonastre at once sought his advice. The scene was an officer’s barrack-room; they tried to be very realistic at the Roscius, and the manager confessed readily to Bob that he would be glad of any hints.

The curtain was supposed to go up on this barrack-room scene. The stage was empty.

Enter Conder, in a suit of white drill—a soldier-servant to Mr Dacre.

Conder: Dacre's a lighted-one, he is. Well he may be; going home to a fine fortune, after having nothing a year. No more regimental duty for him. Drat him! I'd liever blow a cloud and drain a quartern in the canteen than slave on here, a-packing his duds. Anyway the job's nearly done. (Looks round at portman-teaus.) Faith, I'm nearly dead beat. (Sits in an arm-chair.) Forty winks'll do me no harm. (Disposes himself comfortably, and is soon fast asleep.)

A head appears at the back of the stage, where there is a large window opening on to the veranda, and looks cautiously in.

Chatters (played by Mr. Bonastre). H'st (to some one below). H'st. Come up.

A second head appears, and two figures, Chatters and Worlige, both in convict dress, creep stealthily into the room.

Chatters (approaching the table). He's asleep. Now's our chance to secure him. But first turn down the lights. There, now we must gag and secure this chap.

Worlige (viciously). Hadn't I better brain him?

Chatters. Quiet, you fool! We want no noise. He might yell. Get that side. Now, are you ready? One, two—THREE?

From each side of the chair they seize Conder, who struggles violently, but is presently overpowered, gagged, and then securely tied.

Chatters. That settles one of them. The other will be a tougher job, I expect. We sha'n't catch him asleep.

Worlige (who has been looking around the room, produces a hunting-knife which he has picked up). This will soon settle him.

Chatters. Put that down, d'ye hear? I'll have no bloodshed, I tell you, not except in the last extremity. But, come; he may get back now any minute. Look and see if all's right. We'll turn up the light, as if the man had only gone out for a minute, and then hide.

(They go up the stage and out on to the balcony.)

A noise of voices heard R.I. Door in wing R. opens suddenly, and a crowd of officers tumble in singing, "For he's a jolly good fellow, which nobody can deny." Herbert Dacre is in their midst, and they are patting him on the back or trying to shake hands with him. After solemnly singing "Auld Lang Syne," and heartily wishing Dacre good-bye, all retire but Dacre and Archie Legh.

Dacre. Now, old chap, I'm not going to keep you up; off you go to bed.

Legh (who is slightly elevated). I'm going to see the last of

you—won't go home till morning. Can't trust you, Herbert, to go on board alone.

Dacre. Well, there's Conder, he'll take care of me. By the way, I wonder where he is—the rascal! On the loose somewhere, I don't doubt. He'll miss his passage, I dare swear.

Legh. Conder? Want Conder? Shall I go find him?

Dacre. Yes, yes! Come along. (Exeunt R.I.)

As soon as the stage is clear Chatters and Worlige look in at the window at back.

Chatters. I thought that drunken fellow was going to stick here. My eyes, it did give me a start. We could hardly have managed them both.

Worlige. Mebbe they'll come back together. I'd stab 'em both, behind, and enjoy it.

Chatters. H'st; some one's at the door.

Enter Dacre, R.I.

Dacre. Obstinate old ass Archie Legh is, when he's at all "on," and no mistake. I thought I'd never have got rid of him. But where is my fellow, Conder? Has he left me in the lurch just at the last minute? (Looks at watch.) Why, the wagon will be here in less than half an hour, and we shall have barely time to get on board. Well, there's not much to do. I'll pack my mess-clothes myself. (Takes off red mess-jacket and waistcoat, folds them; goes to portmanteau, and kneels down to put them away.)

While he is kneeling Chatters and Worlige creep down from the balcony, and suddenly throw themselves upon him.

Dacre (shouts). Ah! villains!

Chatters. Throttle him! Stop his mouth!

Worlige. If you'd a let me have it my way I'd — (A fierce fight ensues, but at length Dacre is overpowered as his servant was, and treated in the same way.)

Chatters. The game is ours. But we must look slippy. There's no time to lose. First let's get rid of the lag's livery, and on with the gentleman's clothes. Find a suit for yourself, Cockie. I'll put on this. We'll examine the swag to-morrow, when we're well out at sea and past hue and cry.

They retire behind screen, change rapidly, and return just as a loud knocking comes at the door.

Chatters. Go and open the door. Remember, now, I'm master, and you're man.

Enter an old negro, grinning from ear to ear.

Negro. Heah ye are, sah! Wagon am ready for de start. Where am de boxes?"

Worlige. Lend me a hand, Sambo.

"Negro. Me not Sambo. Me Holy Gabolos.

Worlige. Well, Holy Gabos, or whatever your name is, hurry up, or we shall lose our passage. (The boxes are taken out quickly.)

Chatters (following, but turning first toward the balcony). Adieu! Sir Herbert Dacre. I have to thank you for so kindly facilitating my escape from Her Majesty's hulks at Bermuda. I have all your papers, and a good fortnight's start. You may not find it easy, when you follow to England, to dispossess Dacre's double.

Curtain.

There was a little round of applause from the stalls, where two or three privileged friends had witnessed the rehearsal.

"Indeed, Mrs. Bonastre," Bob heard a voice that was familiar say, just behind him, "a fine performance. The situation is striking and original, and the piece admirably played. *Mes compliments.*"

"The marquis! You here?" said Bob surprised.

"Yes, *mon cher*, from the first. It was dark; you did not see me. I adore the drama, and our friend Meggitt has presented me to Mrs. Bonastre, who, with her estimable husband, are the brightest ornaments of the British stage. But you will have something to answer for, Mr. Bonastre, when this play becomes generally known."

"How, marquis? Explain, please."

"To see an escape so ingeniously contrived may inspire some poor devils—I am not hard upon *Messieurs les forçats*. Theirs is a hard lot—it may inspire them with an idea for breaking prison when next they are in durance vile."

It was a very natural remark to make, and Bob listened to it without receiving any particular impression. Yet that remark came back to him long after and with peculiar force, as the reader will by and by see.

What diminished its effect that moment at the Royal Roscius was that a summons came to Bob from the manager's office.

There he found Mr. Bonastre, who introduced him to a sleek, stout man in a badly-fitting frock coat, and a face imperfectly shaved.

"This, Surtees, is my secretary, Mr. Lamb. He has a word to say to you from me."

The word was an offer of an engagement for six months certain at three guineas a week.

CHAPTER XVI.

DAUNT'S QUEST.

MONTHS passed. Poor old Surtees was still immured in his solitary cell; sweet Josephine went daily, wet or fine, to Bond Street; big Bob gained experience and reputation upon the boards of the Royal Roscius.

Sir Richard Daunt, however, since last we met him, had had his troubles. After vainly striving to overbear Josephine's determination to break with him, at least for the present, he had gone abroad. It was to have been a short trip to the Bernese Alps, but the short trip had been prolonged almost indefinitely by an accident—a blow on the knee-cap. February was nearly over before he got to Paris, and there also he was detained. After his return to London, but for the consummate skill of an eminent surgeon, he would have been on crutches for many months more.

The first use he made of his restored powers was to institute inquiries for his friends the Surteeses. The search, however, was fruitless. Daunt at length decided to consult a private inquiry agent, and put the case in the hands of Messrs. Haggie and Horry, who were at this time the most prominent members of this curious modern profession.

Only second to his solicitude for the Surteeses was his desire to find out something about Mrs. Waldo's French maid. But he would not give this job also to the private inquiry office. It would be well to see how Haggie and Horry did their work before he confided secret suspicions to them, which, if clumsily betrayed, might altogether spoil his game.

But to watch Fanchette it was necessary to keep on good terms with the Waldos, to know where they were, their movements and goings on. With this object in view he had called at Carlton Gardens. Mrs. Waldo had received him very cordially, and without a word in reference to their last meeting, and the letters supposed to be lost.

Next day came an invitation to dinner, which Sir Richard readily accepted. It was only a small friendly party, Mrs. Waldo had said, and on arrival Daunt found but two other guests.

"Mr. Meggitt, I don't think you know—" said Mrs. Waldo, introducing the new cashier, who stood nearest her; "Mr. Meggitt, Sir Richard Daunt."

Daunt bowed stiffly.

"Pardon me," he said, "I have already met Mr. Meggitt, and under peculiar circumstances, but we had not then the honor to be acquainted."

Percy Meggitt changed color somewhat, and in spite of his native effrontery could only stammer out a few unintelligible words.

But Daunt had already turned on his heel. Mrs. Waldo was introducing the second guest.

"This is the Marquis de Ojo Verde, a Spanish—"

"Cuban, my dear madam, rather than Spanish; but I am a cosmopolitan—so, I have heard, is Sir Richard Daunt."

Daunt bowed civilly, and spoke a few words of welcome in Spanish. The marquis replied in the same language, but with some hesitation.

"Mine is not the pure Castilian, I fear," he went on, in English, which certainly seemed to Daunt purer than his Spanish. "We American Spaniards have got only a *patois* of our own in exchange for the language of Cervantes and Lope de Vega.

"The language of kings, as Charles V. called it," replied Daunt; "it is a grand and sonorous tongue."

All this time Daunt was furtively examining the marquis, with whose name he was familiar already. He had not forgotten the gambling transaction, as brought out at old Surtees's trial, and he was curious to ascertain what manner of man it was who had victimized Bob.

The Cuban nobleman was outwardly much the same as when he dined with Meggitt at the Junior Belgrave. He was dressed with fastidious nicety, but still in rather a florid style; he wore many jewels and a large star on his breast. But his face, although schooled to courtly smiles, bore the same sinister look; his red and white complexion, so brilliant as to seem artificial, brought out into strong relief, as usual, the fierce black eyebrows and mustachios, and the great prominent bold eyes. In spite of the elaborate polish of his manner, Daunt disliked the man's appearance much.

"No wonder poor Bob lost his money," said the young baronet to himself. "This fellow is more like the croupier of a faro-table than a blue-blooded hidalgo of Spain. I wonder how the Waldos came to know him?"

But the announcement of dinner interrupted these conjectures.

The marquis, the highest in rank, took down Mrs. Waldo, Clara fell to Richard, Meggitt took Augusta Waldo, and Mr. Waldo his youngest daughter and favorite, Helena, Bob's friend.

It was a circular table, with no top or bottom, therefore Daunt found himself between Clara and Mrs. Waldo, with Meggitt immediately opposite him, having Augusta Waldo on one side and Helena on the other.

"Shall you go to our Court this season, marquis?" asked Mrs. Waldo.

"Alas! I am not *bien vu* by my compatriots in power. I was on the wrong side in the last revolution, and I dare not show myself at our Embassy."

"They will know all about you though," thought Daunt, "and I shall make it my business to ask, my friend."

"What a pity! we shall not meet at the State balls," Augusta said, who was making a dead set at the marquis, and this evening was especially decked out to captivate him in a very low dress.

"But we shall elsewhere, divine mademoiselle," replied the marquis, as he gazed with approbation upon his neighbor's snowy shoulders.

"Come, close up, gentlemen, close up!" cried old Waldo, heartily, when the ladies rose and left the table. "Won't any one help me with this bottle of '34 port?"

"It's a grand vintage," said the marquis, with the air of a connoisseur. "We foreigners are not supposed to understand wine, but I think I have a nice palate for port."

"Your Spanish wines are not to be spoken of in the same day as those of Portugal," said Meggitt, rather modestly.

"Pardon me, the Catalan wines have their merits. Now the Valdepeñas Añejo is remarkable for its bouquet and flavor."

"But the Valdepeñas is a wine of La Mancha, not Catalonia," said Daunt, with an air of knowledge.

"You are right; only I have some vineyards, south of Tarragona, which produce a wine of the Valdepeñas class."

"Is that on the estate of which you were speaking to me at the bank the other day?" inquired Waldo, with an air of interest.

"Precisely; they are rich in vineyards, olive-groves, and corn."

"I know the neighborhood of Tarragona well," said Daunt.

"Whereabouts exactly do your lands lie?"

"To the south-west, half a dozen leagues from Agujero del Rey. If you are ever in those parts again, Sir Richard Daunt, remember

my poor house and all that it contains is yours—*à la disposition de usted.*”

“Stay, stay,” laughingly interposed Mr. Waldo; “the bank will have something to say to that. You must not give away your property if we advance—”

“Hush, hush, dear friend; no business details; do not reveal our little negotiations to Sir Richard Daunt.”

“You may rely upon my discretion, I’m sure,” said Daunt.

“Are your Spanish estates equal in fertility to those you have in Italy?” asked Meggitt, seeking to lead the conversation into a new line.

“Yes, for the moment certainly yes. The latter still lie, like truth, at the bottom of the water. They are buried beneath Lake Matanza, which so far refuses to be properly drained.”

“Does Lake Matanza belong to you, marquis?” asked Daunt with some interest. “The Lake Matanza in Lower Lombardy, I mean.”

“Assuredly. It was brought into our family by an heiress of the Qualfaggias, and has since remained our property.”

“It will repay draining, no doubt,” said Daunt. “I have always thought so.”

“You know it then?” asked Mr. Waldo, much interested; “and you think well of the project?”

“If it is done on a sufficiently large scale. I rode all through that country some years ago, and remember it very distinctly.”

“Monsieur has evidently been a great traveler,” said the marquis. “Do you know our New World beyond the Atlantic? and my native island of Cuba?”

“I have been in the United States, but never in Cuba. I promise myself the pleasure some day soon.”

“Any introductions I can give you will be heartily at your service.”

“You are very good, I am sure,” said Daunt, with a grave bow.

“Are you a land-holder, and—”

“Slave-owner, you would say? Alas, yes. But what would you have? I inherited them, and they alone can work the sugar-cane, which is the chief source of our wealth.”

“I suppose you are satisfied that nothing but slave labor would do your work well?” asked Daunt.

“It would kill any other class. That consoles me.”

“But the Moret law is actually in force in Cuba,” continued the young baronet.

The marquis looked at Daunt blankly.

"I have never heard of it," he said.

"Not of the law passed by the Madrid Cortes in 1870 for the gradual emancipation of Cuban slaves?"

"What do we care for laws made at Madrid? The Spanish capital is a long way from Havana."

"You are a 'peninsular,' of course," went on Daunt; "at any rate by birth."

"Oh, of course," replied the marquis, with the air of a man rather on his guard.

"Is the feeling still very strong between *creoles* and *peninsulares*?"

"I can not say; it is long since I paid close attention to our insular politics. They are very, what you call, pettifogging to a man of the world," replied the marquis, shortly. Then, turning to Mr. Waldo, he added, "Your English custom is very impolite. We have left the ladies now for more than half an hour."

The host could not mistake this challenge; he rose from the table, saying, "We'll take our coffee in the drawing-room," and led the way upstairs.

As they went up, Daunt found himself thinking a good deal about this Cuban gentleman, who knew nothing of the great law which threatened his property, and still less of the bitter animosity which subsisted between the two white races of his native isle. The Marquis de Ojo Verde seemed equally abroad, too, as regards the vineyards of his ancestral Spanish home.

"Is he real, or only a sham? I'll go straight to the Spanish Embassy to-morrow morning. Ponce de Leon will tell me all he knows. I dare swear the marquis rooked Bob Surtees, and I don't half believe in all this fabulous wealth."

But it was evident that the marquis was quite at home in Carlton Gardens. He sunk at once into an easy chair, while Augusta Waldo on one side handed him a silver cigarette box, and Clara on the other brought him a light.

"Yes, yes," Augusta said; "you may smoke. Mayn't he, mamma?"

"Oh, it madame and these ladies permit," said the marquis. "I confess I am a slave—I, a slave owner, am myself a slave—to the pernicious weed."

Mrs. Waldo had been talking cordially, affectionately even, with the new cashier, congratulating him on his advancement, and

saying she had heard the most excellent account of him. But then she dismissed him, saying she was neglecting Sir Richard Daunt.

"I can not forgive myself for having troubled you, Sir Richard, about—" she spoke in a lower voice, "about those letters."

"Don't mention it. I had really almost forgotten it. Did you find them?"

"Oh, yes, and in looking them over again I saw that I had quite exaggerated their importance. By the way, what has become of Miss Surtees?"

"I have not the least idea."

"Some one told me, I think, that she had gone into some shop—behind the counter, you know. But I am really not certain. I thought you might know."

"If she has taken a situation in a shop it is in obedience to an impulse which does her the highest credit."

"I thought it more probable that she was obliged to earn her bread. A convict's daughter, with a worthless brother—"

"Miss Surtees is a noble girl," said Daunt, sternly, "and for her brother I have a strong personal regard. As for poor old Mr. Surtees, we may yet find that there has been some terrible mistake."

"I can not share your feeling, Sir Richard Daunt. But do not let us quarrel over these wretched people."

It was not Daunt's wish, either, to break with the Waldos, and, although he soon afterward took his leave, he shook hands with Mrs. Waldo cordially as he said good-night.

As he passed down into the hall he was conscious that some one was close behind him on the stairs. On reaching the last landing he heard a side-door open, and the rustle of a dress; then the words, spoken low but distinctly—

"*Leon, il faut que je te parle demain.*"

And, turning sharp round, Daunt saw that it was Fanchette addressing the Cuban.

"*Tais toi imbecile,*" replied the marquis, promptly, pointing to Daunt, and Fanchette as rapidly withdrew.

In the hall the two men met and looked at each other. Suddenly the marquis burst out in a loud laugh.

"Do not betray me to that excellent and respectable dame, Mrs. Waldo," he said. "It is a simple *amourette*. *Quoi?* I am human, and *soubrettes* were always to my taste."

But their meeting, and the brief words spoken, the employment of the familiar "*tu*" on both sides, gave Daunt food for still deeper thought when he reviewed the events of the evening.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAGGIE AND HARRY.

THE Albany, as every Londoner knows, has two issues, one into Piccadilly, the other into Burlington Gardens. At both exits are officials who exercise a general surveillance upon all who pass in or out. But on the morning after the dinner party at the Waldos' a second unofficial watch was kept at both these points.

In Burlington Gardens the watcher was a decent-looking man, with a black bag such as shoe-makers' journeymen or assistants use when taking home their work. He was a burly man with longish black whiskers and beard, and he wore a soft wide-awake over his eyes. From the way he slunk about, and the furtive glances he cast up and down the street, he seemed anxious to avoid attention. No one, however, noticed him much. The policeman of the beat, who came past once or twice, sniffed at him a little suspiciously, but the man boldly explained his loitering about.

"The guv'nor 'as sent these boots home to a swell in Saville Row, but I ain't to part without the spondulics. Swell says he'll be out directly to go with me to the bank. Told me to wait, so I'm a waiting."

"Right you are," said the bobby, who passed twice again, but only winked portentously.

In crowded Piccadilly the watcher was of another stamp. He was one of those nondescripts—half loafer, half rough—who hang about all the great thoroughfares looking out for a job with baggage, or, if chance favored, a snap at property left unprotected in some passing carriage—an aged man, with snow-white hair, in seedy clothes, a battered tall hat, boots that bulged, and altogether an out-at-elbows air. He stood generally with the waterman on the cab-rank, and helped him with odd jobs; now lifting the iron skid beneath a hansom as the driver swung himself into his seat, or dragging off the horse-cloths, or bringing a bucket of water to a new arrival on the stand. But he never lost sight of the little courtyard into which the Albany passage opens, and whenever he had done a job for the waterman he went up to the pavement on the Royal Academy side, to gaze keenly up and down lest his quarry should have escaped him.

He was just in the act of holding a hansom horse—a brute with

a patent bit in its mouth—as its driver settled himself for the start, when he saw an urchin making toward him from the Albany Gate. He let go his hold of the horse so suddenly that the brute started off at scree, and the driver—shouting “you blooming idiot”—was nearly thrown from his perch. What did the watcher care? He snatched a scrap of paper from the hands of the boy and read:—

“Started this side; now in Bank of England. If he goes up Bond Street I’ll follow; you watch the Arcade and Bond Street, Piccadilly end.”

Accordingly he set off at a rapid, although shambling, pace down Piccadilly, westward; paused a moment at the foot of the Burlington Arcade, and looked on ahead as far as the hatter’s at the corner of Bond Street.

“There he goes.”

It was Sir Richard Daunt, in frock coat and hat, with his umbrella under his arm, his hands behind his back, and his head erect, walking along, not like a sauntering idler, but with the brisk step of a man having an object in view.

He passed down Piccadilly, our friend at his heels; turned into the park at the corner, where his pursuer, keeping outside the railings, but always on the watch, suffered him to go alone. But at Albert Gate, seeing that Daunt still stayed in the park, the other also entered it, and continued to follow, always at a respectable distance behind.

Sir Richard Daunt kept steadily on, past the Knightsbridge Barracks, and always in the park, till he had left the Albert Memorial on the right, when he turned into Queen’s Gate, and made down the long, straight, and spacious road which bears the same name.

“I could have sworn it,” muttered the old man, behind; “although he can’t know much, he means mischief, and is trying to know more. He’s heading straight for Queen’s Gate Place—just what I expected. Lucky I put on the ‘nark’ (watch).”

Sir Richard Daunt did, as his pursuer expected, turn into Queen’s Gate Place. More, he stopped at the Spanish Legation, rang the bell, and went in.

He was in search of information about the Marquis de Ojo Verde, and it was the marquis himself, who, disguised as an old man, was at his heels.

Daunt remained at the Legation about half an hour. On coming out, he walked leisurely back into Queen’s Gate, and hailed the first passing hansom.

The marquis did the same, although his appearance was so much

against the chances of his paying the fare that cabby insisted upon having his money beforehand.

"There's your money," said the marquis, curtly. "Half-a-crown more if you follow that hansom ahead and run the gentry cove down. Scotland Yard. Are you fly?"

The cabby winked, and, flicking up his horse, gave chase.

Daunt's hansom turned down the Cromwell Road and went as far as the Brompton Road, then by Grove Place and Pont Street to Belgrave Street, and so to the Vauxhall Bridge Road.

"What the devil is he up to now?" the marquis asked himself, as the hansom dashed down the Vauxhall Bridge Road into Rochester Row, and pulled up at the entrance to Vincent Square.

However there was no time to waste on conjecture. Jumping out of his cab, which he dismissed, the marquis followed Sir Richard on foot.

The baronet stopped at a corner-house, and went in. It was at Haggie and Horry's.

"An inquiry office. Aha!" said the marquis, "now he is going to put the 'nark' on me. How shall I circumvent him? Haggie and Horry; do I know anything about them? I've heard of them, I think, before."

The Cuban nobleman took two or three turns up and down the pavement, then boldly went to the inquiry office and rang the bell. "Haggie and Horry?" he asked briefly of the clerk, who looked suspiciously at the disreputable old man.

"What do you want with them?" he asked, contemptuously.

"Business. Don't judge by appearances, my dear young friend. They're apt to mislead. Whom can I see?"

"Do you want a principal?"

"Of course. Who melse?"

"Mr. Horry's engaged with a gentleman"—much emphasis on the word—"who's just called. But Mr. Haggie's in."

"That will do. I'll see him."

"Whom shall I say?" asked the clerk, still inclined to be insolent.

"Captain Firkeytoodle, from the Straits of Ballampajang. Come, stir yourself, or I'll make you jump."

Leaving the marquis for a moment, waiting to see Mr. Haggie, let us return to Sir Richard Daunt, who was interviewing the other partner, Mr. Horry.

Mr. Horry was an old buck who still wished to pass as a juvenile. His hair was thick, and, being of the pale reddish hue which

sometimes never turns, was not yet gray. He was proud of his figure, and showed it by wearing a dark green cutaway coat, opening low and tightly buttoned in at the waist. In the opening was a gorgeous scarf, a cataract of spotted satin, reddish-purple in color, and fastened by an enormous cairngorm pin. His manners were in keeping with his costume—elaborate, and he spoke in unctuous terms.

"I am sorry, deeply sorry," began the private inquiry agent, "to be unable as yet to give you news of Mr. Surtees; but we have reason to believe we are on his track."

"Very well, only let me hear without delay the moment you know anything. But to-day I have something else to say to you—another job, in fact." Sir Richard Daunt spoke sharply. "Have you time?"

"To be sure, Sir Richard, to be sure. Delighted to be of service."

"I want a person watched—followed—tracked down."

"Exactly: I quite understand. It is just in our line. Is she—the lady, I mean—Lady—"

"Pshaw! It's a man."

"Ah! the other party. The Co. in fact. Very well. Very well."

"A man," went on Sir Richard; "whom I believe to be an impostor, or worse, who is mixed up in a base intrigue, a villainous plot. But that does not matter. What presses is that you should find out all about this man as speedily as possible."

"His name?"

"He calls himself the Marquis de Ojo Verde, a Cuban marquis of old Spanish descent, but I can not believe that there is any such title in Cuba or Spain. He is not known at the Spanish Legation. I have just come from there."

"Can you give me his address, and his personal description?"

"He is a tall, forbidding-looking man of foreign appearance, much given to jewelry and fine clothes."

"Allow me; one moment; I must make a few notes;" and Mr. Horry with a massive gold pencil wrote down the *signalement* of the marquis from Sir Richard Daunt's lips. "And you can not as yet give us his lordship's address?" he said, when he had finished writing.

"Not at present; but I think if you put a watch at once upon another person—a French maid residing at 29 Carlton Gardens, she is almost certain to meet this fellow in the course of to-day or this evening. Her name is Fanchette Dumoulin,"

"Describe her, too, if you please," said Mr. Horry; and Sir Richard gave a minute account of the appearance of Fanchette.

"Where shall we communicate with you, Sir Richard? Will you call, or shall we write?"

"The Albany will always find me. Please use all possible dispatch. Good-bye."

Meanwhile Mr. Haggie, the other partner, had been closeted with the marquis.

Mr. Haggie was a man of a different stamp to Mr. Horry, much older, and much less careful of his personal appearance. His long neck and long legs ending in great boots, like claws, together with his way of pushing his head forward in an eager inquiring attitude, and the two quill-pens invariably stuck one behind each ear, gave him the look of a "secretary bird," whose rapid, fussy movements to and fro he seemed to reproduce. The resemblance was heightened by the sad colored clothes he generally wore, much of the same tone as the pepper-and-salt plumage of this rapacious bird.

His manner was hasty. He spoke very quickly and almost always in interrogatives.

"Well, well, what is it? Who are you? What do you want?" was his greeting of his visitor.

"To give you a commission if you are prepared to undertake it."

"You, you, you?" replied Mr. Haggie, eyeing the ragged man in front of him.

"This is merely a disguise," replied the other coolly. "I assume it in order to get to you unobserved."

"Should like to know who you are. Tell me, will you?"

"I am a foreigner by birth, a Cuban gentleman of high rank. My name is Xavier Solfatierra, Marqués de Ojo Verde, and here is fifty pounds on account. Are you satisfied now?"

"Certainly; that is—if you can satisfy us that you are the person you describe," said Mr. Haggie, still rather doubtful.

"If it is necessary, of course I shall do so. But I should have thought that by prepayment I could command your services in anything."

"Not at all, marquis; not at all. There are many pitfalls and snares in our profession, and the police are always on the watch. They are not fond of us; we succeed oftener than they do, and we should get no mercy from them if they caught us in anything shady or underhand."

"Do you dare to imply that I would suggest anything of the kind?" said the marquis, indignantly.

"It is better to be cautious and on the safe side. What is it you want us to do?"

"Listen, then. I have reason to believe that I am being followed. I wish to set up a counter watch—a *contre police*, as the French call it. Will you undertake the job?"

"Who is watching you, and why?"

"A certain Sir Richard Daunt; for reasons of his own."

"Do you know those reasons?"

"Not positively; but I suspect they are of a delicate nature—your English ladies are so impressionable. I have had my successes." The suggestion had a ludicrous effect coming from this disreputable looking old man.

"In fact, Sir Richard Daunt is jealous of your attentions to some friend of his? Is that what you would imply?" asked Mr. Haggie.

"Precisely; and he wishes, in order to ascertain whether we meet, to put a spy on me."

"And you wish us to put a spy on his spy. Is that it?"

"And on him. I want to know what he is doing generally, but more particularly with regard to me."

"I understand; but I am sorry to say, marquis, we must decline the commission."

"What! Impossible! I insist—"

Mr. Haggie waved his hand rather contemptuously.

"We have good grounds for refusing. Sir Richard Daunt—"

"Is already a client of yours. Is that what you mean?"

Mr. Haggie started nervously.

"How do you know that?" he said quickly.

"I know a good many things, Mr. Haggie. For instance, I know that Sir Richard is at this moment in this house, in the office of your partner, Mr. Horry."

Mr. Haggie jumped up, and went across the room to where there was a speaking-tube. He whistled through it, spoke a few words, then put the cup to his ear and listened.

"Well," asked the marquis, in a mocking tone, "am I right? But don't stop there. Ask your partner what Daunt's business is to-day—whether he has not come to speak about me."

Mr. Haggie did as requested, and presently, returning to his seat, said, "You are perfectly right in your conjectures. Sir Richard Daunt is here, and you are the subject of his conversa-

tion with Mr Horry. But this makes it all the more impossible for us to undertake your business."

"Pardon me, I know of no people so capable in your line; and I am so convinced of this that I can not consent to forego the benefit of your assistance," said the marquis, in a mild voice, but behind it was just a tinge of menace, at which quick-witted Mr. Haggie looked surprised.

But he said bravely enough, "We only undertake what suits us. Your business does not. It is needless to press it."

"But I insist; you *must* undertake it."

"Who are you that dare to come and browbeat me in my own place? I'll have nothing more to say to you. So good-day."

"Softly, softly. Wait one moment. I have a few more words to say. Did you ever hear of Jimps, the lawyers, of Newcastle?"

"What about them? What do you know of them?" asked Haggie in a quick, nervous manner.

"There were two of them, brothers, in a large way of business, I believe; but they were charged with falsifying accounts and making away with their clients' securities. Both brothers were struck off the rolls, but one escaped to Spain, while the other was caught, and did his 'bit,' seven years at Portland. A word to the police at Newcastle would bring the same punishment on Jabez, the other brother."

"He died in Saragossa—years ago; so I've heard."

"You heard wrong then. He is alive and in London, and I can put my hand on him at any time, in spite of his disguise."

There was a pause. The two men looked at each other keenly without speaking.

"I could tell you something, too, about a friend of yours who was once a medical student, and afterward employed in a baby-farming business on a large scale," went on the marquis. "Shall I?"

"I see we shall have to do what you wish," said Mr. Haggie, blandly. "You have strong cards in your hands."

"Yes, and I can play them. I mean to win the trick. You must not only watch this Daunt for me, but you must tell him just what I choose about me."

"I must consult my partner first. You will allow me to do that, I suppose?"

"Yes; but it must be in here. Whistle for him to come up when he is free. I'll have no tricks."

By and by Mr. Horry came in, splendid as ever. The appear-

ance of his partner's visitor rather surprised him at first, but when formally introduced Horry made the marquis a low bow.

"I understand—I understand—what is it, my dear Haggie?"

"A word in your private ear."

And the partners retired into a corner to talk, while the marquis kept his eye on them carefully. The colloquy was long and anxious. Horry's pale face when it was over was heightened by the crimson scarf he wore, and Haggie was more restless in manner than ever.

"Well?" asked the marquis, coldly.

"It shall be as you wish, my lord," said Mr. Horry, blandly; "you shall know all that we are doing, and in return we may expect—"

"Silence; absolute discretion."

"Where shall we communicate with you? Not at your club?"

"No. You can write there to make an appointment. I will meet you at an address I shall name."

"Perfectly. We are at your orders. Can we offer you any refreshments? No? Then good day."

The moment the door was closed, one partner said to the other—

"Who is he? Can you make out?"

"I have been puzzling my head ever since I came into the room," said Mr. Horry. "I seem to know his voice too."

"He reminded me of Jack Smoult, who was in that big swindle with the long firms," suggested Haggie.

"Too tall, and I should say, too old; but, of course, this chap had a wig. I should say it was Spanish Sam, *alias* Greaser."

"*Alias* the marquis and ever so many more names. If I didn't know Sam was 'at the boat'" (penal servitude). "I'd say so too."

"It's Spanish Sam. The more I think of it the more certain I am."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A MEETING.

ON the Saturday following Sir Richard Daunt's last visit to Haggie and Horry, Josephine left Bond Street about half-past two. She hailed a passing "Royal Blue" bus, but it was full; so she walked on down the street, intending to take another in Piccadilly. But none overtook her and, entering Piccadilly, she walked as fast as she could toward the Green Park.

Passing through the lion gate-way, she took the path which led

straight to Buckingham Palace as her nearest way home, and was already half-way across the park when she heard a voice, weak and feeble from want of breath, gasp out just behind her:

"What a pace you do go! I never saw such a mover. Do please, wait a little, do."

Josephine looked round and saw Lord Wingspur.

She halted for a moment, as if relenting, but she was only looking round for a protector, a policeman—anybody.

Meanwhile, the old beau, smart and swaggering, as usual, with his flower in his button-hole, and his hat on one side, came up alongside her.

"It is quite cruel of you to run away like that; and I had so much to say to you. We haven't met since, since—"

He had evidently quite forgotten when and where.

"How dare you speak to me? I don't know you," cried Josephine, terrified as she again moved on.

But Lord Wingspur managed now to keep by her side, and to ply her with remarks.

"How naughty of you, my dear, to say you do not know me. Why, we are quite old friends. Isn't it a lovely day for a walk, or for Greenwich or Richmond? Will you come down and dine there? Now, come, let's sit down, and we'll make it all up, and then we'll go to Hancock's or Streeter's, or wherever you like, and choose a nice bit of jewelry. What do you prefer—diamonds, or rubies, or pearls?"

"Oh, this is too horrible!" cried Josephine, again breaking away. "What shall I do? Is there no one to help me—no one to protect me from this hideous old man?"

She looked round and saw another figure, that of a gentleman, approaching rapidly from the direction of Piccadilly, and rushed toward him.

"Oh, sir!" she began. "I implore you as a gentleman, a man of honor and proper feeling, I implore you to—"

"Josephine!" cried the other. "I was sure I could not be mistaken. Why, what has happened? What are you doing here?"

"Can it be possible! Richard! Oh, how thankful I feel!" said Josephine, breaking at once into a torrent of tears.

"Do not distress yourself, dearest; I will soon put this all right," replied Sir Richard Daunt, as he went up to the old peer.

"Lord Wingspur," he said, sternly, "I need not ask for any explanation. The situation explains itself. But I must insist, first,

upon an apology to Miss Surtees; and next, that you will take yourself off."

"Miss Surtees! My dear fellow, I hadn't the slightest idea she was a friend of yours. I won't spoil sport, begad! By-bye, Daunt; you're in luck. By-bye!" and with that, giving his hat a still more knowing "cock" on one side, the old *roué* strutted off.

Daunt now led Josephine to a seat, and for an hour or more the two lovers sat there on that bench in the park exchanging confidences, and in sweet converse, which seemed to have no end.

"So Bob has gone on the stage," said Daunt, as they strolled quietly along the Buckingham Palace Road, Pimlico. "Bravo, Bob! when shall I see him?"

"He is no doubt at home now."

"We shall find him then," said Sir Richard.

"Are you coming our way?" asked Josephine. "Have you forgotten our compact?"

"Most certainly I am coming, whether you forbid me or not. And I do not mean to allow you too very far out of my sight again. There shall be no more separation. I have felt it too much this time."

"So have I, Richard, believe me," said Josephine, in a low voice. "But do not misunderstand me. I can not go back from what I have said. My father must be released, his character must be cleared, before—"

"You are mine? I know. Haven't I agreed to that already? But why make ourselves more miserable than can be helped meanwhile? Let us see each other often. It will be a comfort and support to us both. Besides, I shall want to tell you what I am doing, to report progress, and to consult you and Bob."

"I can not say no, Richard. I have hungered too much for you all this time. But here we are at home."

Bob was having a chop, reading as he eat.

"At last I've found you out, Bob. How closely you've been hidden!"

"I haven't. You might have seen me any night at the Royal Roscius. I'm Mr. Francis on the bills."

"The great success of the season, so I hear."

The talk flowed on pleasantly and cheerfully, but at last Bob said:

"Time's up. I shall only just have time to walk back to the theater."

"I'll go with you," said Daunt. "But, before we part, let us

arrange about to-morrow. Has either of you engagements? No; then we'll have a long day together. I'll drive you down to Richmond; we'll lunch somewhere, and then, go on the river. Is it agreed?"

After a tender leave-taking with Josephine, Daunt joined Bob in the street.

"Look here, Bob," he said abruptly. "I think your friend Helena—you see her sometimes, I suppose? Ah, I thought so, at the Bonastres'; well, I think she might be of great use to us just now."

"How so?" asked Bob.

"I want to know more about this French maid of Mrs. Waldo's: where she came from; what sort of person she is; what company she keeps; in short, all about her."

"Helena couldn't find out much."

"But her own maid might. And I have my suspicions about Fanchette. Remember, it came out at the trial that she was the only person who could have got at old Waldo's strong-room key?"

"But nothing of the kind was proved. Besides, what could she do with the key?"

"Give it, or an impression of it in wax, to some one else who had access to the place where the securities were kept, and who could so abstract the bonds—commit the crime in fact for which your father is suffering."

"To whom would Fanchette be likely to give the key? What connection had she with any one at the bank?"

"That has been my difficulty in thinking the matter out. For a long time I could not trace any connection between her and the person I have all along suspected."

"And that is—"

"Meggitt, who is now the cashier."

"Percy Meggitt! Is it possible that you believe him to be base enough to have woven such an infamous plot?"

"I always thought the man a cad, but not a villain till lately."

"But what benefit would my father's disgrace and downfall bring to Meggitt?"

"His promotion, in the first place. He expected to succeed your father, and, as a matter of fact, has done so."

"That, after all, would hardly be enough to tempt a man to commit such a dastardly crime. A few hundreds a year is all the difference between the pay of cashier and assistant-cashier."

"That was another great difficulty. I can only suppose that he

has some much bigger ulterior game in hand, and that he wanted your father out of the way so as to have a clear course before him."

"Have you any idea what his game is?"

"Not yet. I am still in the dark, waiting patiently for evidence for facts and information as they turn up. But I have had a watch set upon his accomplice."

"An accomplice! Whom do you mean?"

"The man calling himself the Marquis Ojo de Verde, the fellow who swindled you at cards."

"Ojo Verde! Is he really a leg, do you think?"

"He looks it," said Daunt; "but there's hardly sufficient proof," he added, with a laugh. "Nor have I any proof as yet that he is very thick with Meggitt. But that I still hope to get at. But he knows Fanchette intimately. Of that I have no doubt."

"I know that, too," said Bob, and he described what he had seen at the café restaurant at Kilburn.

"That's corroborative. I was certain she could not *tutoyer* the marquis and call him by his Christian name unless they were very closely allied."

"Who is this marquis, do you suppose?" asked Bob, innocently.

"Ah! that's the very first thing I want to know. I can not act freely till I do."

Next morning Daunt drove Josephine and her brother to Richmond in his mail phaeton.

They only paused a few minutes at the Star and Garter Hotel. Daunt secured a private dining-room, then all three went down the slope to the river-side, and it was quite late in the afternoon before they returned to the hotel.

By this time all the private rooms were engaged evidently, and in that next door to Daunt and the Surteeses there was a large and noisy party. Their voices, raised high, and shouts of laughter, were heard plainly through the partition.

"Surely," said Bob, "I can't be wrong. That's Mrs. Bonastre. I'd know her voice among a thousand. I wonder whom they're with?"

"Some other people whom I think we know," said Daunt, as several figures passed out on to the balcony from the neighboring room.

There were Mrs. Waldo and her daughters and Horace Wing-spur, and one or two more.

"Oh, this is too enchanting!" cried Clara Waldo. "What a lovely spot!"

"How truly good of you, marquis, to make up this party for us," added Augusta, casting languishing eyes at the Cuban, who looked his best in a light-gray frock coat and a very shiny hat.

"It was Mr. Meggitt's idea," interposed Mrs. Waldo. "You must give him some credit."

"We won't quarrel over that, ladies," said the cashier. "The kindness is on your side in honoring us with your company."

"But don't let's stick up here on the balcony," put in Mrs. Bonastre, with her gay voice. "It's far more fun down in the garden."

"By all means; we'll go into the garden," said Mrs. Waldo, as she sailed back into the dining-room.

"We will join you, *chère madame*, in a few moments," said the marquis. "Mr. Meggitt and I have a few orders to give about the coming feast."

The two men remained on the balcony engaged in earnest conversation.

Presently they came away, and followed the others down into the garden. Daunt caught a word or two of their conversation as they passed in front of him, and what he heard justified him, he thought, in stepping out on the balcony and trying to hear more.

"It won't be easy to talk her over, I tell you; you don't know Fanchette," the marquis had said, as he first came out.

"It's a mere matter of money, I expect," said Meggitt.

"No, it's not. Fanchette's mercenary, of course, so are all of her sex and class and country, but money won't pacify her now. She's mad with jealousy and spite. She hates to see me here, carrying on with the daughter of the house, while she's the servant only of that old cat, the mother."

"She'd better leave the Waldos then."

"If she does she'll be always in my way, and it might be very awkward."

"What, then, do you propose?"

"We must humor her, that's certain. Her great desire, she says, is to leave this country, which she detests, and the drudgery, which she hates still worse. Well, she shall go; we'll help her."

"And if that fails to keep her quiet?"

"I shall try other means. No woman shall make a fool of me, or interfere with my game."

And that was all. Daunt did not wish to be caught listening, and what he had now heard nearly sufficed.

It proved the complicity of Meggitt; it showed that Fanchette, one of his confederates, was dissatisfied; it opened a chance of detaching her from the others, or at least extracting some damning evidence from her.

This little incident had put Sir Richard in great good humor. Bob, too, who had seen Helena, was also in high glee, and Josephine was in excellent spirits.

All three made merry over their dinner, which they had early, so as to enjoy the drive home by daylight.

The only *contretemps*, the only blot on the day's enjoyment, occurred at the moment of their departure from Richmond.

Daunt's phaeton, with his pair of high stepping seventeen-hand roans, stood at the door. He had helped Josephine into her seat, and was taking up the reins preparatory to jumping up beside her, when Mrs. Waldo, with the marquis, and followed by all her gang, came out at the hall door, bent seemingly on a walk in the park.

"Ah, *tiens*, it is that excellent Sir Daunt," said the marquis. "Do you not see him, madame?"

"I do not choose to see everything, marquis," replied Mrs. Waldo, coldly.

"But what a beautiful person is with him! Angelic face, *ma foi*! He has surely good taste."

"That may be questioned, marquis," went on Mrs. Waldo, bitterly adding, in a very loud voice, "It is not good taste, according to our ideas, to *afficher* one's self in public places with such persons. She is a saleswoman at some shop."

"It is a *tendresse alors*! *Mes compliments*, Sir Daunt," cried the marquis, gayly, as he kissed his hand to Sir Richard.

But Mrs. Waldo's words had been heard, and they stabbed Josephine to the quick. Her only retaliation was one glance of proud passionate contempt as they drove away.

CHAPTER XIX.

CLEWS.

A FEW days later Mrs Waldo was in the depths of despair. Everything had gone wrong with her. In the first place, her French maid and factotum threatened to leave her; next, her dress-maker insisted on having a check, and money was very tight with Mrs. Waldo just then.

But the worst blow came at the end of the day thus imbittered by many worries. She got a letter by the night post, the reading of which agitated her terribly.

"The minx!" she said, "the insolent, unforgiving minx! What tempted me, fool that I was, to speak as I did yesterday, when I knew she had me still in her power? What shall I do? Must I yield to her terms!"

Again she read the letter. It was as follows:

"The writer holds certain letters of yours, which, if given to Mr. Waldo or made public, would ruin you forever. Will you buy them, and silence?"

"Their price is one thousand pounds. If you agree, send some man on the third day from this to the garden on the Embankment near Charing Cross at one o'clock. Let your messenger wear a bouquet of lilies of the valley and bluebells, and bring the money in notes. When counted, the letters (seventeen in number) will be given up.

"Your messenger must be alone, or no one will speak to him.
"X."

"A thousand pounds! Where am I to get a thousand pounds? Just now, too, when people are pressing me on every side for cash, and I promised to help Horace over his settling for Punchestown. But I must have it, by hook or crook. At the worst I will ask Onesimus. He can not refuse. This minx, the artful wretch. I could slay her."

She went in person to Wimbledon next day, and made an eloquent appeal.

"You can not refuse me, for the sake of old times," she said. "Remember what letters these are, to whom they refer, what would happen if their contents became known."

"It is just the price of the small Louis Leloir I had promised myself," replied old Dandy with a sigh. "But there, my dear madam, I'll surrender my caprice to your necessity; but I must decline positively to meet any such demands again."

On the third day, soon after twelve, Mrs. Waldo left Carlton Gardens on foot. It surprised the establishment, but all were too well drilled to make any remark. She was very quietly dressed in a simple cloth costume, but she carried a bouquet of lilies of the valley and bluebells in a prominent place on her breast.

Passing along the front of the terrace, she walked quickly across the bottom of Waterloo Place, in full view of the Athenæum and United Service clubs, and so gained Pall Mall.

"Holloa!" exclaimed a man in one of the windows of the Athenæum. "What takes that old cat, Mrs. Waldo, out so early, I wonder? On foot, too! I never heard before of her walking half a dozen yards. I'll see what she's up to. Serve her right after her conduct last Sunday."

The speaker was Sir Richard Daunt, who quickly caught up his hat and sallied forth into the street.

Mrs. Waldo's figure was plainly visible fifty paces ahead, and Daunt followed her unobserved, as she continued along Pall Mall East, through Trafalgar Square, into Duncannon Street, and so to Charing Cross. There she turned quickly down, and made toward the river, but on reaching the Embankment Gardens under Adelphi Terrace she entered them, and sat down.

Here the commissioner came up and accosted her. A short conversation followed, they interchanged parcels, then Mrs. Waldo got up, passed out on to the pavement, hailed a hansom-cab, and was speedily driven away.

Sir Richard Daunt in the distance had witnessed and taken in a good general idea of the scene.

He saw, too, that the commissioner as he walked back toward Charing Cross was met by a woman who seemed to have entered from the road.

The commissioner, after a short colloquy, went one way, eastward; the woman the other, westward, passing close by Sir Richard Daunt. She was veiled closely, but there was something in her figure which seemed not unfamiliar to him.

What was the meaning of all this? Daunt had started with the idea of spying Mrs. Waldo, but Mrs. Waldo had disappeared, and, as the last chance of solving the enigma, he could not resist the temptation of following the other woman.

But in that he was forestalled. As she left the gardens and passed under the railway-arch, a slouching, shabbily dressed man, a man gray-haired and of a certain age, but still very active on his legs, darted out from the entrance of the Metropolitan Station, and also gave chase.

The woman moved nimbly along, and was not to be easily overtaken. She seemed to know the short cuts. Crossing Northumberland Avenue she entered Scotland Yard, threaded the narrow passage which leads into Whitehall, and then, still ahead, crossed the crowded street, abreast of the opening called Buckingham Court, a little secluded passage which leads by the bottom of Spring Gardens into St. James's Park.

Here the pursuer, who was now only a few yards behind, quickened his pace to a run. One word from him brought the woman suddenly to a halt.

"Fanchette!" he cried.

She turned, and stopped, affrighted, exclaiming in her turn—

"Leon!"

An animated colloquy followed in French, little of which, however, reached Daunt's ears. He thought it prudent to pause a little and watch. It was not till the unknown man seized Fanchette's hand roughly by the wrist and twisted it that he hastened forward to her rescue.

"Give it me," the man was saying in a furious tone still in French. "I will know what this mystery means, and what brings you out here at this time of day!"

"Leave me; it is my affair. Leave me, I say, Leon, or I will call!"

But now Daunt's hand was on the fellow's collar, and, with a sharp wrench the young baronet twisted him round, saying, "Who are you, who lay hands on women in the open London streets? I shall give you in charge."

But the man kept his head down, and struggled violently to break away from Daunt.

"Quiet, will you! or I'll knock you over. What was he doing to you, my dear?" asked Daunt, as he still held the other by the collar.

"Why, surely," added Daunt, hastily, "I can not be mistaken; you are Mrs. Waldo's French maid, Fanchette, and you called this fellow Leon! Can it be possible!"

The idea at once came forcibly upon him that it was the marquis whom he had thus captured, but, almost before he had time to think again, his prisoner, by a fresh and more adroit movement, wriggled himself free, and took to his heels.

"At least I will know where he goes, and why he is in this masquerading attire," cried Daunt, abandoning Fanchette, and giving chase.

But by the time Daunt began to follow, the mysterious personage in front had gained a fair start, and was making the most of it. He had run straight ahead as fast as his legs could carry him, and Daunt just caught a glimpse of him turning to the left into that part of Spring Gardens which communicates with the park.

Sir Richard ran after him, but presently slackened his pace into a walk. The fugitive was just in sight, and that was all Daunt

wanted. His chief object in following the Cuban was to track him down, and gain some information about him.

"For a Cuban marquis," thought Daunt, who kept close to the fugitive's heels, "our friend knows his London remarkably well."

Daunt might well say so. The marquis doubled in and out of the intricate labyrinth of streets leading to and around Leicester Square as though he had lived in the neighborhood all his life.

"Better and better," said Sir Richard to himself. "My gentleman wishes to show me that he is quite at home in Seven Dials."

Where next? Up Newport Court into Little Newport Street, and so to Sceptre Street, past the mass of low tenements which have since been pulled down to give place to a noble block of Peabody Buildings.

From Sceptre Street the marquis went off to the right into Phoenix Street, just opposite the row of quaint red-tiled white-washed cottages in Chapel Place; thence into Stacey Street, down into New Compton Street, sharp into Church Passage, and thus gained Dudley Street.

Where was the marquis now?

Disappearing down White Lion Street. Here he turned off sharp into Castle Street, and across the top of Upper St. Martin's Lane, into West Street.

"Back to his old diggings. I wonder if he thinks he has got rid of me? It looks like it. For there, at last, he goes to ground."

They were once more in Sceptre Street. The marquis had halted in front of a dingy den. On one side was a shop-front, on which were a few shreds of cat's-meat, on the other an entrance with a half-door, communicating with a black passage. Down this he went with the assurance and *aplomb* of a man who felt at home.

Daunt promptly followed, nothing dismayed.

The black passage opened into a small court, at one end of which was a second door, and the façade of a grimy house.

Daunt at once knocked at the door. It was opened, after some delay, by a woman—a stout, evil-looking, blowsy creature, with one or two wisps of hair hanging untidily over her soddened face.

"What d'ye want?" she asked gruffly, in a strange tongue. It was American-English, spoken with a French accent.

"What d'ye want?" she repeated. "This ain't no place for swells to fool around."

"A friend of mine. He's just gone in. He expects me. I have an appointment with him," said Daunt, making up the first excuse he could.

"Greaser? Why didn't you say at once? Come right in."

She held the door open for Daunt, who passed through and was about to close it again when a voice from the passage was heard crying, "Hold on. I'm in this swim. Let me in, too."

The woman tried to shut the door in his face.

"No, no; you don't mamzelle. You know me; if you don't you ought, for I got you that last 'stretch' in Tothill Fields. I'm coming in, too."

"What, Faske?" said Daunt, in great surprise. "I never expected to see you here. What brings you?"

The detective put his finger to his nose.

"I expect it's as well I came," said the detective, quietly. "In less than five minutes you'd have been in hot water, if no worse."

"This house then—"

"Has one of the worst characters in all Seven Dials."

"Come, mister, that ain't fair," put in the woman.

"Stow it, mamzelle, or I'll run you straight in. But what game are you on, Sir Richard?" asked Faske. "I saw you pass through Scotland Yard an hour or so ago, and followed quite by chance into Buckingham Court. After that I was in the whole hunt, from find to finish, and a monstrous good run, too."

"But why did you think it necessary to follow, Faske?" said Daunt, still rather annoyed.

"I felt sure there was some plant on, so I felt it my duty to keep you in sight."

"Did you recognize my man? I want to find out who he is; that's what I've been after all day."

"I could never see his face rightly, never; that bothered me. I seemed to know his slouch and that hang of the left leg—all old French lags have it, you know; but not seeing his face rightly, and the gray hair, I was puzzled, I won't deny."

"I am determined to know, sooner or later."

"Is he 'wanted'? Is it a job in which I can lend a hand, or a private adventure of your own? I dare say I shall come across him."

Daunt did not care to tell the police-officer why he was so anxious to unveil the mystery about the marquis. Faske had taken so strong a part against Mr. Surtees that it would not have been easy to persuade him that there was still a chance of reversing the sentence. To have made the detective an ally, for the present, at any rate, would probably have done more harm than good.

"I'll come to you if I'm in trouble, Faske," said the baronet.

"But, in the meantime, why shouldn't we search the house? We may find our man somewhere."

"No good at all, Sir Richard; the house has another exit. It communicates with Burrard Street at the back, and you can get into the Hotel Gaillard by that way. Besides, if you found your friend, have you a warrant to arrest him, or any good grounds for meddling with him?"

Daunt shook his head.

"Then we couldn't touch him, even if we caught him; and the sooner we get out of these slums the better both for you and me."

CHAPTER XX.

FANCHETTE GONE.

NEXT day Daunt sent for Mr. Haggie.

The confidential agent was full of apologies and excuses.

"I had hoped before this to give you some news of Mr. Surtees," he began.

"It's not necessary, thank you," replied Daunt, coldly. "Mr. Surtees will be here this afternoon. I have seen him constantly this last week."

"Can it be possible? How can he have escaped us, I wonder?"

"Much in the same way as the Marquis de Ojo Verde has, since I commissioned you to inquire about him."

"Pardon me, Sir Richard, we have had our eye on the marquis for some time past, but there was really nothing to tell you. He leads the life of a gentleman of fashion between his chambers, his friends' mansions, and his club, the Junior Belgrave."

"Ah, I have heard of it," said Daunt, dryly. "Does he go there, I wonder, in disguise, as I saw him yesterday in Seven Dials?"

"The marquis in Seven Dials! Oh, Sir Richard, you are joking, surely, or you must be strangely mistaken."

"Not a bit of it. My watch on the fellow is evidently better than yours. That was what I wanted to tell you. I shall not require your assistance any longer," and he dismissed the agent summarily.

Presently Bob Surtees came in, brimful of news.

"Only think, Daunt," he began at once, "it is most extraordinary—I have seen Helena to-day."

"That is not so very extraordinary, Bob."

"No, but what she told me is. Just fancy, Fanchette has gone."

"Gone!" cried Daunt, in intense surprise. "When? Why? Where?"

"She and old Mother Waldo have had a flaming row, not the first, it appears, but yesterday things came to a crisis. Fanchette was out when she was wanted; Mrs. Waldo slanged her, the Frenchwoman gave it to her back, and the noise was heard all over the house. The upshot of it all was that Fanchette walked off the same day."

"Does anybody know what is to become of her?"

"They say she started for Paris by the night-mail."

"Well, that is natural enough, it is her home, and she would go there, of course; but what will she do, I wonder, now?" said Daunt, musing over the announcement.

"Helena's maid says that Fanchette swaggered a good deal about her future plans. It seems she has got together a good bit of money; and she thinks of buying a business for herself in the millinery, or *lingerie*, or hair-dressing line."

"We must follow her and find out. I expect Fanchette will be of great use to us yet. It is quite evident that she has fallen out with the marquis, and for the present, at any rate, will have nothing more to say to him."

Then Daunt passed on to describe what had occurred the day before.

"I suppose it *was* the marquis?" said Bob.

"I have not the slightest doubt of it myself," replied Daunt; "and it convinces me, in the first place, that the fellow is not what he pretends; and in the second, that he is a moving spirit in the whole villainy. But we must know more about him, and for that I rely on you."

"What can I do? You know you have only to tell me."

"You must replace me in keeping your eye on the marquis, for now he will not give me a chance of getting near him, and we can not trust Haggie and Horry any more. Besides, as soon as I can get about again I shall start for Paris."

"Paris? After Fanchette, I suppose?"

"Precisely. I know my Paris; I can speak French fluently, and, thanks to my legal course there, I am well known to the magistracy and at the Prefecture. It will be odd if I do not come upon her track and hunt up all about her."

"Shall you start soon? Shall we see you again?" asked Bob, a

little awkwardly, but with evident anxiety. "Josephine would like—I mean she wants—"

"Go on, my dear Bob. You know, or ought to know, that I am absolutely and completely at her and your disposal."

"We are thinking of breaking up our little establishment in Pimlico. I am going on a short provincial tour, and Josephine is anxious to move to Chatham."

"To Chatham?"

"Yes; the dear dad is to be transferred to that prison, and Josephine is anxious to be as near him as possible."

"What a strange girl she is!" cried Daunt, in genuine admiration.

"Can you help her to a new situation there?"

"It shall be done," replied Daunt, readily; and it was not till he had seen his love settled down in her new home, that he began his preparations for following Fanchette to Paris.

It was first of all necessary to reach Paris *incognito*; if he went openly, if his departure for the gay capital were bruited about, as it would certainly be by the papers, the fact might raise the suspicions of the marquis and his confederates.

The first step, then, was to get to Paris unobserved. He had no means of knowing whether or not any watch had been set on his movements, but he did not much care. His plan was to leave the Albany in broad daylight, but not for any of the railway stations which booked direct for Paris.

He meant to travel by a more circuitous route.

One fine morning in June he left his chambers dressed in frock-coat and tall hat, and went to breakfast at the Athenæum. The road he took was along Piccadilly and down Waterloo Place. Twice *en route* he halted, suddenly turned round, and retraced his steps for a few dozen yards. On both occasions he detected the same individual following him, who, when he turned back, turned back, too.

"They are watching me, then," said Daunt to himself. "I'll lead this fellow a fine dance. It will be odd if I don't give him the slip," and he went on to his club.

There he secured a table near the window having a full command of Waterloo Place and part of Pall Mall. As he calmly discussed his breakfast he saw the spy, a shabbily dressed, seedy gentleman in a suit of rusty black, hovering about between the Arcade under Her Majesty's Theater and the corner of Waterloo Place.

When he had finished his breakfast he sent a trusty messenger

to his bankers and got cash for a check for £500. Daunt filled his purse with the notes and gold; then, buttoning up his coat, sallied forth.

He walked quickly toward Charing Cross, and, on arriving there, got on the top of a Brixton bus.

From this point of vantage, as he traveled along, he plainly saw his friend, the spy, call a hansom cab and follow. The bus went as far as Kennington church. There Daunt changed into a tram-car, and went as far as New Cross. The hansom still followed. At New Cross Daunt got into the station of the East London Railway, and booked to Liverpool Street. As the train ran into the platform he got into a first-class carriage, and saw his shadow suddenly appear and enter a third. But Daunt went on to Liverpool Street, and there changed quickly to the underground Metropolitan line, by which he traveled as far as Gower Street.

On emerging into the Euston Road he looked round, and, seeing nothing of his pursuer, said with a laugh, "I think I have shaken the fellow off at last;" then, having consulted his watch, he hailed a cab, and was driven to the Euston terminus.

A train was just starting for Willesden Junction. Daunt took it, and a quarter of an hour after he had reached that main center of our northern railway system.

It was now little more than one o'clock.

"Tummond ought to be here by this time," was Sir Richard's soliloquy. "I hope he has made no mistake. If all goes well I shall catch the half past one express, and be at Liverpool in time for dinner. Ha! there he is," and Sir Richard went up to where the faithful servitor was standing with a small collection of baggage.

"You did what I told you?" asked Sir Richard.

"Certainly, sir. I drove with the baggage to Broad Street station; I then came on here by Chalk Farm."

"Were you followed, do you think?"

"There was a chap saw me getting into the cab who came up and spoke to me. Wanted to know where Major Smith lived—the gentleman, you know, sir, as has X22; asked me, too, if I was going into the country. I said my master was going down into Hertfordshire for a bit, and I was to meet him there with the luggage."

"Capital, Tummond; that throws them completely off the scent. But here is my train. Mind, I must have a carriage to myself. See about it, will you, and tip the guard."

When the half past six train reached Liverpool a very different

person descended from the carriage into which Sir Richard Daunt had entered. Instead of the young baronet, with his slight, active figure, this was a person inclined to corpulence, who walked with the staid, ponderous step of middle age. He wore trim-cut whiskers, and not the light-brown beard of Sir Richard Daunt. His hair also was gray and very long. He was dressed in sober clothes, had a broad-brimmed hat, and round his neck a rather crumpled white tie. His gold-rimmed spectacles increased the solemnity of his grave face, and his whole appearance was that of a dissenting minister who had got rather a foreign look from a long course of continental travel.

Thus disguised, Sir Richard Daunt drove to the Stork Hotel. He secured a room there, giving the name of Joliau, and an address in Paris. Next morning he embarked on board one of the Pacific steamers, and a couple of days later landed at Bordeaux.

In the books of the Hotel Gotineau, where he lodged, he gave the same name, and called himself a native of Caen, in Normandy. In Bordeaux he only stayed one night; thence went on through to Paris. The hotel he had selected there was little better than a *maison meublée*, but it was quiet, and out of the way of English visitors.

It was situated at the end of the Quai Voltaire, not far from the Palais de Justice.

Sir Richard had particular reasons for residing in this neighborhood. He wished to be handy to the Prefecture, and the chief office of the French detective police.

It was to the head of it, or, as he is known in Paris, the *Chef de la Sûreté*, that he paid his first visit next morning.

Although in aspect still a young man, M. Acmé had had some five-and-twenty years' police experience, and was thoroughly master of his peculiar profession. A small man, quick and active in voice and gesture, one who in speaking to you at once gave you his whole undivided attention, looking keenly at you with his bright, inquisitive eyes, as though to read your inmost thoughts.

"Well, sir," said M. Acmé, when Sir Richard was introduced. They were old friends, but Daunt's disguise was impenetrable. "In what can I be of service to you?"

"I have called to give some information, and to ask for some. I have reason to think that a crime has been committed, followed by a failure of justice in the conviction of an innocent man."

"Here, in France?"

"No, in England," then seeing M. Acmé shrug his shoulders as

it he did not much care to distress himself with matters foreign to his own country, "but some of the persons implicated are French people; one resides here, in Paris, I believe, and it is to unearth her that I ask your assistance."

"Monsieur is French?" asked Acmé.

Sir Richard, in answer, pointed to the card bearing the name of Juliau.

"You must first assure me of your right to claim our assistance, before I can make any answer to your request."

"I think we have met before, M. Acmé!" and then, with a laugh at the Frenchman's evident astonishment, Daunt hastily removed his gray wig and his gold-brimmed spectacles, saying, "I have imposed upon one of the shrewdest *policiers* in Europe."

"Sir Richard Daunt!" cried M. Acmé, springing to his feet, and laughing heartily; "I am fairly caught; but what has led to this travesty? Please explain."

Daunt, having first resumed his wig, took his seat, and proceeded to tell his whole story.

M. Acmé listened with deep attention.

"It is cleverly reasoned out; and your conclusions are probable, although it will be difficult to prove them; clearly that is to say, so as to shake the sentence of the English court. You have not told me yet how I can help."

"Why, by unmasking that *soi distant* marquis, of course, and by putting me on the trace of Fanchette."

"The first is next to impossible, *mon cher*; we have no facts to go upon."

"But I have given you his description, and his Christian name, Leon; and the fact that he *tire à gauche*, or drags his left leg, a sure mark of an old galley-slave."

"It is not enough; his *signalement* will not help us, for he is sure to be in disguise; Leon is a common Christian name, and there are thousands of old convicts in the country. Abandon M. Leon for the present and stick to Fanchette."

"You can help me there, can't you?"

"I dare say. Paris is a large place, but the Prefecture has many eyes, and no one can escape it for long. What do you say this woman Fanchette intended to do?"

"Her own fellow-servants declare that she meant to buy the goodwill of some shop *à crèmerie* or *à lingerie*, or the business of a *coiffeur*, but there may be a thousand such in Paris, and it may not be easy to find out her new address."

"We have ways and means. In the first place, if she has bought a business there will be a record of the transfer. A parrow search of the registers will tell us what businesses have lately changed hands; but, before we do that, let us think for one moment what she would probably prefer. The *cremerie*, I think, we may leave out of the question."

"But why?"

"It would not be in her line. A lady's-maid would not care to mix herself up with the sale of food. I doubt very much whether she would take to *lingerie*; it is an intricate business that requires some special training. Now, the hair-dressing is different. It is part of the lady's-maid's daily work."

"But are not *coiffeurs* in Paris always men?"

"There is no reason why a woman should not be a proprietor and employ male assistants. Yes; I think we will first exhaust that line of inquiry. Let me see, in whose hands shall I put it? Jobard? Yes, Jobard will do," and, touching his bell, the *chef* summoned that subordinate to his presence. "You wish, I presume, to preserve your *incognito*?" he went on to Daunt.

"I think so; it will give me a better chance with Fanchette if we find her."

"What is your address?"

"For the present, the Hôtel Turenne; but, if I am to stay here for long, I shall take an apartment, provided you can recommend me a good, safe servant."

"We will see about that by and by; but here is Jobard." And as M. Acmé spoke the door opened and gave admission to a tall, well-dressed, middle aged man, with a pleasing countenance and a military air.

"This is M. Joliau," said the *chef* to his subordinate. "He has need of certain information which I think you will be able to procure. The matter is secret, and of the utmost importance."

And the *chef* proceeded to explain to M. Jobard what it was he wanted to do.

Daunt and the detective then left the Palais together, the latter promising to call at the Hôtel Turenne within a day or two at the latest.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE RUE DU BAC.

ON the third day M. Jobard called.

"Well," said Sir Richard, "what success?"

"Not much, I fear, at present. Unless, indeed, I misunderstood your description of Madame—or was it Mademoiselle—Fanchette?"

"The latter; as far as I know, the woman was not married."

"And she was young?"

"Comparatively so, certainly."

"But not old or gray-haired?"

"Oh, no! not in the least. I particularly noticed her magnificent black hair, which was all the more remarkable from the contrast with her dead-white complexion."

"It is as I fear; my lady answers all requirements—she has lately bought the business, she has dark eyes, black eyebrows, and dead-white complexion, but she is old, *passée*, a woman of a certain age, with a marked tendency to *embonpoint*."

"It is not Fanchette, then, or at least not at all like her. Unless, indeed, she has purposely altered her appearance."

"Under what name does she go?"

"It is not Fanchette Dumoulin, you may be sure. The name is Poirat—*veuve* Poirat. It is painted up small under the name of her predecessor, Renaudin, who has recently retired, and with his savings bought a villa and farm in Touraine. But what do you say, monsieur? Shall we go together and inspect this shop?"

"With all my heart. Let us start at once."

It was in the Rue du Bac, an establishment with some pretensions clearly. It professed to do everything. There were inscriptions in gilt letters upon the signboards, and around the shop front, that bore witness to this. Here were to be had *coiffures de mariées*, *leçons de coiffure*, *teinturerie à la minute de cheveux*, *parfumerie au choix*; while that skillfulness was no empty boast was proved by the display of three "diplomas of capacity," and one or two medals granted by goodness knows whom.

"There is the nest," said M. Jobard; "it is for you, monsieur, to say whether it contains your bird or another."

"I will soon settle that," replied Daunt, making straight for the door.

"Stay, monsieur, stay; is it safe—does she know you?"

"She has never seen me before—like this," at which remark the detective winked knowingly at Daunt, thereby showing that he had long since seen this, the disguise.

"*Bon jour, madame,*" said Daunt, with elaborate civility, as he entered the shop.

"*Bon jour, monsieur,*" replied the lady at the counter, with equal politeness.

Was it Fanchette, or not? Surely it was her voice, but, as the detective had said, instead of a young woman this was one of a certain age. Was she really as old as she looked at the first glance?

Her hair was gray, no doubt; but where were the tell-tale wrinkles, the drawn mouth, the faded eyes, the dried skin? signs unmistakable, which in spite of all artifices betray advancing years.

But there was no old age in her rather high-pitched not unpleasant voice, and it was with much vivacity and some pertness that she addressed Daunt, who did not seem in any hurry to commence the conversation.

"*Eh bien, monsieur, in what can I oblige you?*"

"Ah, madame, pardon; I fear I have made some mistake. I was seeking an esteemed old friend, M. Renaudin. Is he no longer here?"

"No, monsieur; he is retired from affairs, and with a nice little fortune; *bien entendu.*"

"Let us hope that madame will equally find fortune in this coquettish establishment. But it is unfortunate that my friend has gone away. I have a message for him from a person in England. Do you know England, madame?"

"Oh, yes! I was a confidential companion to a lady of rank, in London. I lived in the West End, near Pall Mall."

During this conversation Sir Richard had been watching her closely; and now he had no longer any doubt as to her identity.

Pall Mall! Carlton Gardens! It must be Fanchette herself.

As he thus looked hard he wondered whether she suspected him in any way. But there was not the slightest symptom of this, and he thought it prudent, therefore, to withdraw from the shop before her suspicions were aroused.

"That is the woman sure enough," he said. "It is very clever of you to have found her out so soon. But this is only the beginning of the business."

"Monsieur wishes to know all about her, I suppose—to set a watch upon her, in fact?"

"Exactly. How do you think it can best be done?"

"I think monsieur had better take up his residence in the same house. There is an apartment to let on the *entresol* immediately above the shop. When once installed there monsieur will be able to keep his eye on the lady, and by and by, on the strength of being a neighbor, he may strike up a closer acquaintance."

"An excellent idea! I will carry it out at once."

"But cautiously, monsieur, cautiously. You had better pretend to seek madame's advice before taking the rooms."

Sir Richard readily assented, and presently returned to Fanchette's shop.

"Madame," he said, as he re-entered, "I am desolated at being so importunate; but you were so obliging just now that I venture to request another great favor of so charming a person."

"Ah, monsieur," said Fanchette, simpering, "no excuses, I beg."

"I had another object in calling this morning, but the *beaux yeux* of madame completely drove it out of my head. My friend M. Renaudin told me some time ago that there was an apartment to let in this house."

"Yes," said Fanchette, promptly, "and it is still vacant. Is monsieur seeking a new *gîte*? We shall be fortunate to secure so agreeable a person as a fellow-lodger."

"Oh, madame, you are too good. It is enough inducement to be near you."

Fanchette smiled and showed all her white teeth at the compliment.

"But perhaps madame could tell me," went on Daunt, "something more of the house, the landlord, the *locataires*. I am a peaceable, easy-going man, living on my own modest *rentes*, and I desire to spend my time tranquilly in a decent and respectable place."

"Monsieur will assuredly find all that he seeks here," said Fanchette, with a most engaging air, and quite a captivating smile; "I am but newly come into the neighborhood, but I have found it all that I could wish."

"Madame's recommendation is more than sufficient," said Sir Richard; "I will go to the *concierge*; he will no doubt show me the rooms."

Everything was speedily and satisfactorily arranged. Within a

couple of days M. Joliau, *alias* Sir Richard Daunt, took possession of the *entresol* in the Rue du Bac. He had furnished it from the nearest upholsterer's, and his friends at the Prefecture had provided him with a female servant, called Delphine, a thoroughly trustworthy and confidential woman, who was no other than the wife of M. Jobard.

Acting under her master's instructions, Delphine lost no time in worming herself into Fanchette's confidence. She listened attentively to the other's grievances, her loneliness, her need for some strong support and sound advice in her business, and had at once tendered her the soundest advice.

"Madame should marry again," Delphine said one morning as she returned from the Halles, where she had been marketing. "*Mon Dieu*, what a chance!"

"*Tais-toi*," replied Fanchette, playfully, hanging her head and pretending to blush; "I am far too old, and gray-haired."

"The latter need not trouble you long in such a shop as yours," cried Delphine, gayly; "but madame is younger than she looks, I feel sure."

"How do you know that?" said Fanchette, sharply, turning on her.

"It is easy to see that some trouble, no doubt, has turned madame's hair. She can not be more than five-and-twenty, surely, or thirty at the most. Marry! *Je le crois bien*, you have but to choose."

"I fear to risk my little fortune and my happiness. Men are so mercenary and changeable; you can not trust them all."

"Madame should take some middle-aged man, a *rentier*, *bien posé*, with a thorough knowledge of affairs—some one like my master, *par exemple*."

"M. Joliau is a bachelor, then?"

"He has never been married. His heart was in his business, an excellent business too; he made it himself, and the fortune which leaves him so early entirely at his ease."

"What was his *métier*?" asked Fanchette, deeply interested.

"A wholesale grain merchant, with a *spécialité* in oil-cake for cattle, a process which he discovered himself. He is very clever, you must understand, and could squeeze money out of old stones."

"It is strange that he never married," went on Fanchette, thoughtfully, and clinging to the main idea in her mind.

"He was too much occupied, as I told you, and he had no near friends to put him in the right road. But now he is tired of it, I

know, and he would gladly change his condition, if the right woman only came in his way. She would be fortunate, madame, I assure you, who secured so excellent a man."

This was the first of several conversations of the same character. Delphine, quite by accident of course, constantly threw herself in Fanchette's way, and Fanchette was never tired of hearing what there was to be said about the old gentleman upstairs.

What she had learned, together with M. Joliau's engaging ways, had evidently impressed her much. When they met, which happened frequently in the door-way, where Fanchette stood smiling, or in the shop, when M. Joliau entered to give her good-day, there was always an interchange of compliments and much pleasant little talk. It was by this time *voisin* and *voisine* with them.

The attentions of M. Joliau were not less marked than the pleasure with which Fanchette received them.

It was quite a joke in the neighborhood and in the house. Common gossip declared that they were going to make a match of it, and most people were agreed that it was a very wise thing to do. Their names were constantly coupled together, and if any *fête* or function were coming off they were both invited as a matter of course.

They were thus asked to honor with their presence a grand wedding which took place from their house, one of those showy ceremonies in which the Parisian *bourgeois* delights; when, for once at least in their lives, bride and bridegroom, their relations, and all their guests, drive in carriages to the Bois de Boulogne, to alight at the Cascade, and perambulate, two and two, arm in arm, about the place.

There were no less than six carriages at this wedding—*voitures de remise de grande luxe*—and the breakfast was equal to the occasion.

After a couple of hours' feasting, the whole party rose to make a promenade through the woods. Fanchette of course took M. Joliau's arm. She was beaming with delight, remembering many soft speeches whispered into her ear by her neighbor at the table, and she was in great hopes that he might be about, on this auspicious occasion, to lay himself and his fortune at her feet.

M. Joliau's language certainly encouraged the idea.

"What could be more delightful than such a *tête-à-tête* as this?" he asked, with a languishing glance. "Would that it might last forever."

"Ah, monsieur!" was all that Fanchette could reply.

"It I could only find a response in the quarter I desire,"

M. Joliau took Fanchette's hand, and seemed on the point of speaking much more tenderly, when his companion gave a half scream, and almost fainted in his arms.

"That man!" she cried. "Come let us go back; he must not see me, not for worlds, with you," she gasped out.



CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE BANK.

WALDO'S was little changed since we were last there. Mr. Waldo had been in failing health of late, and was sometimes compelled to absent himself for days together.

When this was the case papers dealing with important questions were referred to him at home. Occasionally Mr. Dandy, with manifest reluctance, tore himself away from his *dilettante* life at Wimbledon and looked in at the bank. But there were many matters, part of the every-day routine business, which would brook no delay, and which had to be disposed of then and there. All such work fell upon the shoulders of Mr. Percy Meggitt, who, as cashier, stood next to the partners in the establishment.

As I have said, he was a thorough master of his business. He came, in consequence, to be trusted more and more by his employers, especially by Mr. Dandy.

A considerable change had come over Mr. Meggitt within the last few months.

He had blossomed out and expanded in harmony with his improved fortunes. He indulged more freely in his fondness for showy swagger, and aspired more and more to be thought a tip top swell, a fashionable man about town. They hated him more than ever at the bank.

"Who's here to-day?" asked young Driffield one morning when he came in late. "Either of the guv'nors?"

"No; only Lord Percy," that being the name by which Meggitt now went in the bank. "And he has asked twice already for you. You are to go in to him at once."

"It's very surprising, Mr. Driffield," said Meggitt, severely, when the offending clerk appeared, "most surprising that you can not be up to time. I must bring your want of punctuality to the notice of the firm."

"I hope you won't this time, sir; it sha'n't occur again."

"So you said last time, and to-day you are later than ever. No; I must tell Mr. Dandy: I expect him here to-day. That will do," said Mr. Meggitt, coldly.

Mr. Dandy arrived later in the day. He went straight into the bank-parlor, where he found the cashier hard at work.

"Well, Meggitt," said the senior partner, in his cheery little voice, "how is business going to-day?"

"Nothing could be better, sir."

"How about that Chilian railway stock, of which we hold so much?"

"There is a decided movement upward. What do you think we had better do, sir?"

"Give Limming orders to sell if they touch sixty one; the money will just do for that mortgage you were talking about."

"You still approve of the investment, sir?"

"Of course, and so does Waldo; don't you agree?"

"I do, most certainly, sir, if you ask my opinion. Everything is in order. Claytons have seen the title-deeds, which perfectly satisfy them as to the security. The bank will receive seven per cent., and, if we were obliged to foreclose, the lands, when reclaimed, would fetch twice the amount of our loan."

"I think it is very clever of you to have got us such a client. How did you come across the Marquis de Ojo Verde?"

"I met him abroad, sir. Accident first made us acquainted, and we soon became great friends."

"He is extremely rich, is he not?"

"He has a current account here with a deposit of never less than eight or ten thousand pounds."

"Excellent; you are a treasure, Meggitt. And he is not the only new customer you have brought the bank; there are Fleming and Co., of Manchester, and that Yorkshire connection, and those new wharfingers, and the Swiss people for whom we have become correspondents, and the great mercury mine in Andalusia. It was all your doing; really, Meggitt, the bank is extremely obliged to you."

"You know, sir, you can command my best energies. I owe everything to the bank."

"Then the bank won't be ungrateful, as you will find in the long run. But there, all that will keep; I am in a hurry; there is a great sale at Christie's to-day."

"One moment, sir; I should like to speak to you about Mr. Driffield, one of the clerks."

"Oh! don't bother me with such details. I leave all those mat-

ters in your hands;" and so saying, Mr. Dandy seized his hat and ran off to the sale.

The day's business went on steadily and without intermission.

By and by young Driffield came in timidly, like a dog in disgrace, with his tail between his legs.

"Well," asked the cashier, abruptly, "what do you want? I have been talking to Mr. Dandy about you. But you might have waited till I sent for you. You will hear your fate fast enough. What brings you here, I repeat?"

"I am doing discount clerk just now, sir, instead of Jenkins, who is on his holiday."

"Well, well, I know that; and you have to enter all acceptances in the bill-book. I hope you are careful to do them exactly?"

"I try to do my best, sir. That is why I have come to you now. There are these two bills for £7000 and £5000 accepted by Rothschilds. Ought they not to go back to be verified and checked?"

"By whom are they drawn?"

"By Flemings, of Manchester."

"Flemings; an excellent firm, although new to us. Why should they go back?" asked the cashier, sharply. "Are they not perfectly correct and in due form?"

"Not quite, sir. The indorsements are not dated."

"Let me look at them," went on Mr. Meggitt, still more sharply; and as he spoke he looked so keenly at the young clerk that a shrewd observer might have detected some anxiety in the glance. But at that moment Mr. Waldo walked straight into the parlor.

"You, sir!" cried Meggitt. "I never hoped to see you here to-day. I sincerely trust you are better, and that there is nothing rash in your coming to the office."

"I am much better, much better, thank you, Mr. Meggitt; in fact, almost myself," replied the working partner. "I could not bear to stay away. Besides, to-day I had particular reasons for coming to business. You know those German wharfingers—"

"Baumgartner and Gottlieb? Certainly."

"Yes. Well. I am in a state of some doubt as to their— But what are you doing here?"

This was to Mr. Driffield, who, still holding the Rothschild bills in his hand, had stood there doubting whether to go or stay.

"I was speaking to Mr. Meggitt about two slightly irregular acceptances which I thought ought to be referred back."

"Whose are they?"

"Drawn by Fleming of Manchester, and accepted by Rothschilds. They are not—"

Mr. Waldo waved his hand, as though the mention of the great princes of finance was more than sufficient for him.

"Yes, yes, Driffield, that will do," went on Meggitt. "Leave the bills with me. I shall probably step over to New Court before the day is out, and I will see that the correction is made."

The young clerk left the office, and Mr. Waldo remained alone with his cashier.

"Baumgartner and Gottlieb, you were saying, Mr. Waldo—" proceeded Meggitt, after a pause.

"A very curious thing has occurred. You know we have made them large advances on dock warrants?"

"Yes; six or seven thousand pounds. I can easily tell you the amount if you will wait a moment. The warrants are chiefly for spelter, pig-lead, and Swedish iron, lying at the firm's wharf—the Providence Wharf."

"Precisely; the Providence Wharf. Well, my old friend Smithson, you know, the colonial broker, hearing I was laid up, came to see me this morning; partly that, and partly, I think, to ask my advice. He also had some advances on dock warrants for cochineal—"

"Yes," said Meggitt, showing a keen interest.

"The warrants bore the stamp 'Providence Wharf.' Never having heard of it, he sent a clerk down to inquire about the place and inspect the goods—"

"Quite so; what then?" Meggitt seemed more and more interested.

"The goods were there right enough; there and in some neighboring warehouses, Merchiscens', for which Baumgartners paid rent."

"Ah! Then why was Mr. Smithson dissatisfied or uneasy?"

"The clerk, it seems, did not consider that he had done enough; so he went on to the dock company to verify the entry of the goods in their books. What d'ye think he found? A 'stop' on them in favor of another party."

"Dear me, how awkward! And what did Smithson do?"

"You know it was almost a Mansion House affair, and he did talk of having Baumgartners up before the Lord Mayor."

"Why didn't he?" asked Meggitt, coolly. "It seems a rascally transaction."

"Baumgartners explained that it was all a stupid mistake of one

of their clerks; they promised the 'stop' should be at once removed, and the goods handed over to Smithson, if he would go no further."

"Did he agree?"

"No; it was that he came to consult me about, and, in fact, which has brought me here."

"What shall you advise, sir?"

"You see we are largely mixed up with these people, and I don't like to think how much we might lose if anything went wrong with them."

"It may have been a mistake after all," suggested Meggitt.

"Which might be repeated. How do we know they are not carrying on this game—putting double sets of warrants into circulation; getting advances twice over, in fact, for the same goods?"

"They would be certainly found out in the end; and just think of the risk they would run, the shame of exposure, and the consequences."

"I know all that; but still we might be left planted with a lot of their fictitious paper. We have six odd thousand now; how much of that is false?"

"I should certainly have no more dealings with them. They must be slack unbusiness-like people at best; but, as to our present engagements, I question much the wisdom of pressing matters to the bitter end. Suppose the worst came to the worst, that we ran them in, convicted them of fraud? What would our position be?"

"We shall have rid the commercial community of two unconscionable rogues."

"And have lost six thousand pounds in the transaction. No, sir; if you ask my advice, I say watch and wait. Let us see whether they intend to repay their loans, and, if there is the slightest suspicion, lay hands on all we can."

"I dare say you are right," said old Waldo, musing. His recent illness had robbed him of much of his old, practical common sense, and he was inclined to vacillate and hesitate a good deal on such occasions as these. Meggitt helped him greatly to make up his mind.

"We will not press the matter then, at present; but meanwhile there must be no more transactions with them. I am convinced of that, and I think Mr. Dandy would bear me out."

"No doubt, sir. He seldom differs with you. By the way, he was here this morning."

"Really; did he stay long? What business have you been doing?"

"The most important is the withdrawal of our large holdings in Chilian railway stock, and the transfer of the same to a mortgage."

"The mortgage we were speaking of—on the marquis's Italian estates?"

Meggitt replied in the affirmative.

"By the way, have you seen our friend the marquis? I have a message for him from my wife."

"He will be here probably this afternoon. I promised to let him have an answer with regard to the mortgage directly the firm decided."

"If he does not come in before I go, tell him, will you, Mrs. Waldo counts on him for next Saturday at Kew, and begs he will not forget her ball. You are coming, I think, Meggitt? All right."

Then the two settled down at the desks, and went on with their work for another hour, at the end of which Mr. Waldo, who was still far from strong, left the bank.

By this time the business day was drawing to a close. The outer doors of the bank were shut, the public were excluded; only the *employés* were still there, chained to their desks, balancing, entering, totaling, and completing the operations of the day.

But Hoskins came into the bank-parlor about five P.M., to say the Marquis de Ojo Verde had called. He was in his brougham at the door; would Mr. Meggitt go out and speak to him?

The cashier obeyed the summons with less alacrity than so important a client of the bank might have expected.

"Well," asked the marquis, eagerly, "what do they say? Will they advance the hundred thou.?"

"On certain conditions," answered Meggitt, sulkily.

"What conditions? Are not the title-deeds *en règle*? Do they wish for more information? I will give them any amount."

"They wish this to be the last transaction between you and them," replied Meggitt, looking still more sullen.

"You are more *maussade*, more *gauche*, to-day than ever, *m. cher*. What fly has stung you?"

"Spare me your French, you know I hate it. Talk White-chapel, it will suit you better."

"Miserable cur! Don't stir up my black blood—" began the marquis in a threatening voice, his manner changing suddenly.

"What's up? I *will* know; I insist."

"This is no place for us to quarrel in," said Meggitt, rather more

civily. He seemed cowed at once by the other's fierce air. "We may be observed, overheard; and I have much to say to you."

"Pick your own place, Monsieur Meggitt; but, wherever we meet, remember that you will find your match in me."

"I don't want to meet you at all. I wish I never had met you. You've been my curse ever since."

"It is you who are quarreling now. But, *voyons*, be reasonable. Why excite yourself unduly? Give me at least some idea of what has occurred? Was it my fault or yours?"

"Your abominable culpable carelessness has nearly ruined all. But for the merest fluke, the chance that I was on the spot—"

"A chance I always calculated upon, *mon cher*."

"But for the merest fluke," went on Meggitt, little heeding the interruption, "and on two separate occasions, all the fat would have been in the fire."

CHAPTER XXIII.

VULTURES AND THEIR PREY.

A MONTH or so after Josephine had settled down to her new life at Chatham, Bob came down by agreement, and the pair proceeded together to the prison. Their father was "due for a visit," and his children were only too eager to avail themselves of permission to see Mr. Surtees again.

Bob and Josephine, having left their cab at some little distance, approached the gate, and rang the small bell. The porter who answered took their visiting order, examined it, and told them they must wait.

"The labor parties are being formed. I can't interrupt the parade," he said, shortly.

There was a little bench on one side, and there they seated themselves till their turn arrived.

Presently the gate-keeper came out and threw open the center gates. The measured tramp of hundreds of heavy feet was heard approaching, and then came a sad and pitiful procession; the convicts marching with military precision, hundreds of them—two and two—formed into small parties, each accompanied by its warders, and all bound for the "works."

The march to labor lasted half an hour: and it was just two before Bob and Josephine were admitted into the precincts of the prison.

They found themselves in a narrow compartment, little bigger than a box, in another adjoining stood the warder, and in a third beyond him, behind a wire grating, they saw the sad, pale face of Mr. Surtees.

"Have you seen Sir Richard lately?" asked Mr. Surtees. "I hoped, perhaps, that he would have come with you."

"Of course he would," answered Josephine, "but he is abroad on important business."

"Yes, father," said Bob, "Daunt and I are in great hopes of finding out something soon. We are on the track of the right person at last, and Richard is away following up the clew."

"I pray he may succeed. The time is long, very long, and my burden is hard to bear."

"Oh, dear father," said Josephine, earnestly, "have confidence in us; have patience for a little while more. Trust in Richard and Bob, and rest assured that your innocence will soon be proved."

"I wish I could think so," replied poor old Surtees, despondingly. "Sometimes I think I shall not live to be free again, still less to be rehabilitated in the eyes of the world."

Bob and Josephine walked back slowly to the town, both of them very disconsolate and unhappy.

"Oh, Bob, why can't we do more? It is so dreadful to think that we must leave him there, buried alive as it seems, and with no immediate hope of setting him free."

"We must not be cast down, Josephine. Daunt is very hopeful, you know."

"Yes, but everything moves so slowly. Richard has been already a long time in Paris, and, except that he has found that woman, I can't see that we are a bit nearer the end. And you, Bob, what have you done?"

"I have my eye on Meggitt and the marquis."

"That's not much good unless you can find something against them."

"I have a little scheme in my head which ought to enable me to penetrate their secrets, and I am going to try it to-morrow or the next day."

"What is this wonderful plan?"

"Well, it may seem rather sneaky to you; but all's fair in love and war, and we are at war—with two of the biggest villains unhung. I am going straight into the enemy's camp."

"Bob! aren't you afraid? Suppose they were to find you out. But how shall you get in?"

"For a long time I was puzzled how to get near them unobserved. I could not well go to either of their houses openly. They would not have let me in, or, if they had, they would not have talked their secrets before me. Then I thought I might surprise them at their club, where I know they often meet."

"The Junior Belgrave? That hateful place where you lost all that money? But you are not a member. How would you get in?"

"That was my difficulty. But after thinking a good deal about it all, I consulted Tummond, Richard's man. He knows pretty well what we are about, and he has suggested the plan. He is a thrifty man, glad to earn an extra penny or two. He goes out a good deal, to wait, and I am going with him."

"But where?"

"At the club, at the Waldo's, anywhere where these two scoundrels go. I'll dog them about, and I'm bound, sooner or later, to catch something they say, or, at any rate, guess what they are at."

"But you will be recognized directly, depend upon it."

"Trust me for that. What! a leading gentleman of the Royal Roscius not able to disguise himself? I'll bet my own sister won't know me in my make-up."

"I do hope you will be careful. It's a great risk."

"I'll be bold and cautious, both. But I must do something, and this really seems to be the best."

Meggitt's dinners at the Junior Belgrave had become larger, more frequent, and more *recherché* since his advancement at the bank.

He gave one of them a night or two after his meeting with the marquis at the door of the bank. It was a grand affair, as usual. Several of our friends were there—Lord Wingspur, for instance; Horace Wingspur, too; and, of course, the marquis. The dinner was most elaborate, the wines perfect, the attendance excellent. They did these things wonderfully well at the Junior Belgrave, and Mr. Meggitt was a member so profuse and liberal in his expenditure that he could count always upon being admirably served.

The guests sat long at table; conversation was lively and well maintained; the marquis more than usually entertaining.

He was one of the last to leave, and, as he was moving away—they had adjourned to the smoking-room—Meggitt said, "Don't go yet, I should like a word with you."

"With all my heart," replied the marquis, and he again sat down.

"Bring some cigars and two brandies-and-soda," said Meggitt to a waiter who was hovering near the table.

"Who are you?" he added; "I don't know your face and you are not in the club livery?"

"I have been taken on extra, sir, to-night, on account of the dinner," replied the waiter. He was a sedate, stolid-looking man, of middle age, with neatly trimmed gray whiskers, and no mustache.

"I seem to know that fellow's face," casually observed the marquis. "I wonder where I have seen him before?"

"In some of those haunts you frequent," answered Meggitt, sulkily.

"And where I have often the pleasure of meeting you. But there, what's come over you? You are as surly as a bear this last day or two. Out with it, man; don't brood; make a clean breast of it if there is anything on your mind."

"There is a good deal, I can tell you. Things are going wrong, and we are running too great risks. You must draw in."

"We will see. But be more explicit. What has happened?"

"Those people—Baumgartner and Gottlieb, the wharfingers—that is if there are such people, and if they are not men of straw, had better look out for squalls; they have barely escaped arrest as it is."

Just as Meggitt answered the waiter brought the brandies-and-soda, and waited at the table adjoining while he took out the corks.

"The devil!" cried the marquis, almost jumping to his feet, but whether startled by the announcement of this particular news, or the pop of the soda-water bottle, it was impossible to say.

"What are you waiting for?" said the marquis, angrily, to the servant, who still stood by.

"It's two-and-sevenpence, sir," replied the waiter, in a matter-of-fact way, as he looked at Meggitt.

"Tell them to add it to my dinner bill. That will do—" and the waiter departed.

"I know what to do with Baumgartner and Gottlieb; you need not advise or lecture me. But is that all?"

"By no means; nor is it the worst. You know Fleming & Co., of Manchester?"

"Naturally. What of them?"

"These bills were drawn by them," said Meggitt, producing two long strips of tissue paper, "and accepted by Rothschilds."

"Well, it's all regular, is it not?" asked the marquis, as he turned over the bills in his hand.

"Examine the indorsements. They are signed, you will find, but no dates have been added."

"*Caramba*—how extraordinary!" almost hissed the marquis beneath his set teeth. "Well, go on; how was this found out?"

"By the discount clerk, young Driffield."

The marquis whistled.

"However, it's all plain sailing enough now that we know the bills have not fallen into the wrong hands. I will keep them to-night, but you shall have them again the first thing in the morning. One word more; this Driffield, who is he—a smart fellow?"

"On the contrary, he is rather a lout, unpunctual, and generally neglectful in his work. So much so that I have Mr. Dandy's permission to send him away."

"He had better not go. It may be dangerous to lose sight of him; get him kept on now, and he will be devoted to you for life. We don't want this talked about; and a little word from you will no doubt stop his tongue."

"I think you are right," replied Meggitt; "the matter can easily be settled. But are you going?"

"Yes, I have work to do to night, and it is already late. Shall we walk down the street together?"

Meggitt acquiesced, and they went into the hall to put on their great-coats, in which they were assisted by the same waiter who had served them in the smoking-room.

"You understand," the marquis said, finally, "about this young Driffield. He must be kept on, and his silence secured."

"You can rely upon me for that. I shall continue to do my best, of course."

"You had better, for your own sake," observed the marquis, coolly. "Not but what I will admit that you have shown considerable tact and presence of mind in this matter of the bills. As for Baumgartner and Gottlieb, the fools— But enough said. I shall see you again early in the morning, when we can consult further."

"Yes; and there is the Waldos' ball to-morrow night. I suppose we shall meet there," added Meggitt, as the two passed out of the club portals.

It was the last ball in Carlton Gardens.

Another season, barren of results for the Waldo girls, was coming to an end. Clara had been foiled in her attempt upon Sir Richard Daunt.

Augusta, who had spread her toils for the marquis, had not pro-

gressed much further than her sister toward a settlement in life. He made love to her, but in a bold, ardent fashion that frightened her.

As for Helena, the best of the bunch, the course of true love did not run too smoothly for her, as we are aware. She saw Bob Surtees but rarely, and always by stealth. The future was black, indeed.

They did things well at the Waldos'. Their balls were especially popular. Not only was the supper superb—no small consideration with some modern ball-goers—the music entrancing, the floor like glass, but peculiar facilities were offered for flirtations and tender *tête-à-têtes*.

The Waldo girls, old campaigners that they were, had devised a number of snug nests cunningly contrived for solitary couples that desired to withdraw from the crowd. It was from one of these that Meggitt, who had come late, heard proceeding a loud vigorous voice, which he immediately recognized.

"My dearest and best beloved, I will have it so."

"Hush, Leon, do be more circumspect. Remember there are people within a few feet of us."

"I will say it in my native Spanish. *Queridita de mi alma!* How long will you leave me to languish without hope of reward?"

"Oh, Leon," faltered the other, "what can I say when you look at me like that? I feel that I am yours, wholly yours."

"Then why deny me your hand? Let me hold it here to my heart. You do not love me, Augusta."

"I do, do—fondly, passionately; but you are too hasty, and you ask too much. When we are engaged—"

"Till then," cried the marquis, evasively, "I will snatch this kiss, and this, and this—"

There were a faint scream, a slight struggle, and a sound that could not be mistaken. Then Meggitt, by coughing loudly, and calling the marquis by name, put an end to the pretty scene.

"What is it? Why do you interrupt and intrude?" he asked, angrily. "How long have you been there?"

"Half an hour or more," replied Meggitt, with a meaning smile. "But tell me, aren't you going rather far? Do you mean to marry the girl?"

"Why not? She is a dainty morsel—sweet, and clean, and wholesome, like all your English girls. She pleases me—greatly."

"Suppose her father asks certain inconvenient questions when you propose? and what would Fanchette say?"

"Bah! Fanchette has chosen to take herself off. She has broken with us, and I don't want to see her again."

"It may be necessary, though, unless you are prepared to be betrayed. She is going to be married, I hear."

"To whom?" inquired the marquis, fiercely. "How have you heard?"

"Carapata has sent over a message by a sure hand. As the man could not find you he came to me. That is what I want to tell you."

The marquis pondered for a moment, his forehead contracting, and his fierce eyebrows scowling darkly.

"Not here. Let us go down to the card-room, supper-room—anywhere, if necessary, away from the rest."

Just before they passed down-stairs Helena had gone into the supper-room, saying,

"Will some one give me a glass of lemonade? I want it carried upstairs."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said one of the strange waiters coming up, "Lemonade, I think you said?"

There was a ring in his voice that sent a thrill through Helena, and she looked at the waiter hard.

"Will you take it upstairs, please? It is for my father. I will show you the room," and she led the way out of the supper-room.

"Bob!" she cried, directly they were on the stairs, "how dare you? How wicked of you to run such risks! You could have seen me to-morrow—"

"I didn't come to see you at all," replied Bob, coolly.

"How cruel of you, then! What is it? You know if you are found out it will be said that you came to see me. I am a wretched, unhappy girl."

And with that poor Helena began to cry.

"Don't be silly, darling," said Bob, taking her hand, and trying to soothe her. "I am only after those villains. I heard something last night, and now I have followed them here. There, there, don't cry, darling," he went on, in a soothing voice, using the stronger and more practical argument a lover has always at command.

"Do be quiet, Bob; do take care; some one is coming," whispered Helena, as, blushing deeply, she disengaged herself from his embrace.

The voices were heard approaching, and the next minute two men appeared descending the stairs.

"By Jove! they're my two! I wonder whether they saw?" cried Bob, as, surrendering the lemonade to Helena, he turned, and quickly regained the supper-room.

"They're a rum lot," said Meggitt, "these Waldo girls. I could have sworn that fellow was kissing Helena on the stairs! Didn't you see? I wonder who the man was."

"*Mo foi*, yes. But what is it to me? Come on; let's have your news. It may be necessary to act without delay."

They entered the supper-room, and took their seats at a disengaged table not far from the counter, and close to a screen which hid the movements of the servants coming and going about the lift.

"What does Carapata say?"

"Here is the letter." It was a dirty scrap, with a few lines scrawled on in French, of which the following is a translation:

"Warning to the master. There are hawks abroad. Some stranger is desperately *amoureux* of Fanchette. He lives in the same house in the Rue du Bac, and I have seen them together like two turtle-doves in the Bois; name, Joliau; profession, *rentier*; age, uncertain; old, but well preserved."

The marquis read the foregoing attentively more than once; then bent his head upon his hand and thought.

"Well?" asked Meggitt, anxiously. "Suspicious, don't you think?"

"How can I tell, you fool, unless I know more? There may be nothing in it after all."

"How shall we find out?"

"There is only one way: I must go over to Paris and see for myself."

"Will it be safe for you to show there? Won't the police be after you—"

At that moment the marquis kicked Meggitt violently under the table, as a caution to be careful, and he heard the marquis say abruptly to a servant who was standing by,

"What do you want? Can't you leave two gentlemen discuss their private affairs without intrusion?"

"I was sent, my lord, to ask what you would take. There are soup, salmon mayonnaise, *chaudfroid*, *galantine de volaille*—" The waiter was glibly running over the items when the marquis interrupted him.

"Are you one of Mr. Waldo's servants? No? Only engaged for the night? Where have I seen you before?"

"At your lordship's club, the Junior Belgrave, my lord. I sometimes go there to assist."

"I remember you now. You were there last night; and, what is more, you were given to the same trick of listening then. If I only thought you were—"

It was now Meggitt's turn to interrupt. He gave the servant an order for supper, and with such intention that the marquis knew it was to get the man for a moment out of the way.

"It *is* a rum go. There is more in this than meets the eye. That's the chap we saw kissing Helena on the stairs."

"I thought as much. Then he is no waiter after all."

"Of course not. More; he can be only one person—"

"And that is—"

"Young Surtees. Don't you know Surtees was always sweet on Helena Waldo? That would explain the scene on the stairs, and, in fact, his being here."

"Yes but not his being at the Junior Belgrave Club. He came there to spy on us, as he has here. But I'll be even with him, you'll see."

"We must have no scandal in public. Remember where you are."

"I shall do nothing rash you may depend upon it, and nothing in this house. But when any one falls foul of me he had better take care. The father was in our way, and we removed him. Now the son crosses our path; he must be scotched like a snake, or knocked on the head like a toad."

Soon after this ominous speech the marquis, without making any adieus, quietly left the house. The ball was still in full swing, and would last at least a couple of hours more.

"It is barely half past two. I can be back here in less than an hour."

He returned, as he expected, before half past three, just as the last carriages were rolling away from the awning-covered dock in Carlton Gardens. He was accompanied by two evil-looking ruffians, whom he had hunted up in Seven Dials.

"We sha'n't have long to wait; only look out for the 'coppers,' and keep your eye on me."

It was striking four when Hunter's men, the last to leave the house, came up the area stairs. There were half a dozen of them, and among them were Tummond and our friend Bob Surtees, the latter still disguised, and wearing an old gray overcoat and "pot" hat. He bade his late associates good-night—or rather "good-

morning," for the dawn had broken, and it was broad daylight—and walked alone toward the steps below the Duke of York's column. He was on his way to the Pimlico lodging he still occupied, through the park.

"That's your man. You know what to do; choose your own place," said the marquis.

"Right you are, boss; we'll quiet him, never fear;" and one of them quickly shambled ahead under the houses, so as to overtake Bob Surtees, while the other followed behind.

The park was almost deserted at this early hour; for the moment the policemen, its usual guardians, were nowhere to be seen. There seemed no protection for a passer-by nearer than the sentries at Buckingham Palace.

"Got a light, guv'nor," said the first ruffian, who had turned suddenly and met Bob Surtees as he approached. "No? Well, open your baccy-pouch and give us a chaw."

"I have neither tobacco nor lights," said Bob, shortly. "Be off."

"Not so fast, guv'nor. Any way, speak a chap civilly; that won't cost you much. Give us a brown, then, to get a drain of soloop at the next stall."

"I'll give you nothing; stand out of my way, I say." Big Bob drew himself up to his full height, and looked an ugly customer to tackle.

But the second ruffian, who was following, came up suddenly, and before Bob was aware of his proximity attacked him from behind. A cloth, containing a sponge impregnated with chloroform, was thrown over Bob's head, and he became unconscious after a very short struggle.

All this took place near the roadway leading past Marlborough House in Pall Mall.

Almost simultaneously a four-wheeled cab appeared, from which the marquis alighted quickly, saying:

"Now, sharp's the word. Bundle him in!"

Bob was put into the cab, the two ruffians followed, and it was driven away toward Victoria Station.

At that moment a policeman came round the corner, and the marquis immediately walked toward him.

"What's up?" asked the guardian of the streets, motioning to the rapidly retreating cab.

"Friend of mine," said the marquis. "Mops and brooms. Had

to send him home in a cab; that's all. Been keeping it up rather late."

"So have I," replied the bobby, laconically, "all night long; and I wish I was between the sheets."

"Ah, I'm pretty sleepy, too. Well, we'll soon be in bed now. Good-morning, and pleasant dreams," and each went his own way.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MARQUIS IN PARIS.

FANCHETTE returned home very pensive and silent after her encounter with the rough in the Bois de Boulogne. M. Joliau tried to enliven her, and raise her spirits, but all to no purpose. She had had a shock, and was evidently sore afraid.

For the next two or three days she remained invisible, and when, finally, she appeared, she certainly looked weak and ill.

"I am truly delighted," said M. Joliau, on seeing her at the door of her little room at the back of the shop, as he was passing down-stairs. "Truly delighted to see you out and about again, but madame is still *souffrante*, I fear."

"Monsieur is most sympathetic and kind. I wish I had more such friends."

"You may rely on my devotion and discretion. I am wholly yours."

"Oh, monsieur, I have been so wronged! and I, the victim, have caused such grievous wrong to others—wrongs that I would gladly repair if I could."

"Why not at once unburden your heart? Tell me all your trouble? What is it you have done?"

"It was not my doing—at least, I yielded to the persuasions of the man I thought I loved. He is a villain. I have sacrificed everything to him, yet still he persecutes me, and I can not escape him."

"Surely you are alarming yourself unnecessarily. Remember the law can protect you."

"Not from him!" cried Fanchette, almost hysterically. "*Mon Dieu!*" she cried, "what is that? That voice!"

It came from a gentleman who at that moment was inquiring for Mme. Poirat in the shop, and who the next minute walked, quite without ceremony, into the inner room.

"Leon! I knew it. What brings you here?"

It was the marquis himself, dressed, as usual, with florid precision in tight-fitting frock-coat, and looking from the top of his shiny hat to the tips of his shiny boots, quite the nobleman—from Cuba.

"*Tiens!*" he began, in a mocking tone, "I fear I am *de trop*. Pray tell me if I intrude. Who are you?" he went on, finding Fanchette could not bring herself to speak.

"Pierre Joliau, at your service and madame's, the honor of whose acquaintance I am proud to enjoy. Who, pray, are you?"

"A much older friend of madame—Poirat? yes, Poirat—than you, and one who has far more right to be here."

"That I deny, and I appeal to madame herself."

"I am her affianced husband," coolly replied the marquis.

"How can your claim equal mine?"

"Monsieur is my neighbor," said Fanchette, speaking timidly and for the first time; "he called merely to inquire after my health."

"And having had his answer he should have retired."

M. Joliau took the hint, and rising from the chair, walked out.

"Who is that old fool?" the marquis asked, long before M. Joliau was out of hearing. "Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Not in so many words; but I have been long expecting him to propose."

"And you would have accepted him? How about me?"

"I had no hopes of your keeping your promise," said Fanchette, rather sadly. "I have been disappointed again and again."

"Why did you leave London when I wished you to remain there?"

"There was nothing more to be done. I had served you as you wished. Why should I continue my hateful slavery with that horrible woman?"

"And you preferred Paris to London?"

"Paris and independence. And so would you, Leon. Listen to me. Why not settle down here? We might be so happy together, Leon. My business prospers; I am making money fast—honestly too. Give up all your great schemes, I beseech you. Think of the risks. You will be far happier in a quiet life."

The marquis sat there, thoughtfully, and without speaking for a time.

"No," he said at length; "it is impossible. I can not withdraw yet; things are too complicated; there will be too much

danger in it; I must see them to the end. Besides, I can not live in Paris; as you know, it is not safe for me. Even now I am risking much in being here. But when I heard that this old fool was paying his addresses to you—when I thought that you were perhaps forgetting me, I bravely set out, ready to face all dangers once more, to see you again.”

So great was the influence of this extraordinary man over Fanchette that she drank in with avidity those tender expressions, and believed them, every word.

“You know, Leon,” she said, “you are *mon homme*, my first and only love. While you are true to me I am ready to follow you all over the world.”

“You will go back to England, then?”

“Yes,” replied Fanchette, a little doubtfully; “but not under the same conditions as before. I am not to be in service, and in the same house where you sit at table with my masters, and make soft eyes at the master’s daughters, while I weep out my heart in a kitchen below.”

“No, you shall be a marchioness, at least as much as I am a marquis. We will take a villa somewhere in the country, or in the Isle of Wight, and I shall only now and again visit town.”

“When shall we be married?” asked Fanchette, rather anxiously. “Here, before we leave?”

“No, my child, it would not be safe for me to go before Monsieur le Maire. Wait till we get back to English soil; once there, I promise you the knot shall at once be tied; meanwhile, let us go to breakfast—*chez Foyot*—it is only a step.

CHAPTER XXV.

CARAPATA’S WARNING.

DAUNT, let us drop his alias, now that he is about to act as himself again, regained his apartment, somewhat chafed and disappointed at the sudden reappearance of the marquis, and the failure of his plans. The only thing that consoled him was that the presence of the marquis in Paris might lead to his identification by the French detective police.

Daunt prepared to give effect to this idea directly completing his toilet; he took his hat and sallied forth, having left instructions with Madame Jobard to keep an eye on Fanchette.

"If they go out," he said, "she or the man, singly or together, follow them, and the first chance send word to the Prefecture."

News came about noon. A note from Delphine to the *chef de la Sûreté*. It was as follows:

"Left Rue du Bac at twelve. Are now at breakfast *chez Foyot*, Rue Vaugiraud."

Accompanied by Daunt in another disguised Jobard took post opposite Foyot's; but quite another half an hour elapsed before Fanchette and the marquis left the restaurant.

They seemed to have no intention of returning to the Rue du Bac. Both had the self-satisfied, contented air of people who had breakfasted well. The marquis, with his coat thrown open, was enjoying a full-flavored cigar; while Fanchette hung on his arm with a pleased simper on her face, as though this were happiness indeed.

They passed together into the Luxembourg Gardens, and stayed there under the shade of the trees.

Jobard followed, alone; Daunt could see him circling round and round, till presently he approached the same seat. There he took out a newspaper and composed himself to read.

His proximity did not seem to disturb the marquis in the least, and the three sat there together, side by side, for quite half an hour.

Daunt was wondering how long this waiting game would last, when a fresh turn was given to the adventure by the approach of a disreputable-looking ruffian, whom Daunt, as he passed, recognized as the man who had spoken to Fanchette in the Bois de Boulogne. This man, more seedy and miserable than ever, slouched up to where the marquis and the others were seated.

"What! Carapata? Here! What brings him, I wonder? He has perhaps something to say."

The fellow came closer, and seemed on the point of speaking to the marquis, when he suddenly halted, his jaw fell, he turned at once on his heel, and walked quickly away.

"Saperlotte, it is strange!" muttered the marquis between his teeth. "What fly has stung him, I wonder? there must be danger near," and with that he stole a furtive glance at his companion on the bench, a glance which M. Jobard bore with imperturbable self-possession.

"Come, Fanchette, I must know what this means," went on the marquis, as he rose and hurried after Carapata. A few steps suf-

ficed to overtake the other, but, as they came alongside, Carapata said, excitedly.

"Don't speak to me. Pass on; there is danger; *la rousse*."

"Where? When?" asked the marquis, as he passed.

"There! there! on the bench, by your very side. It was *Le Major*"—Jobard had served and earned a grade of drum-major in a regiment of the line—"Le Major, M. Jobard, one of the cleverest from the *cuisine* (Prefecture)."

"Where can I see you? Come to the *bibine* of Père Barabas to-night at twelve." And without waiting for an answer the marquis and Fanchette walked quickly to the nearest cab station, then, taking there a *fiacre*, were driven rapidly away.

While this little episode was in progress Jobard had made a sign to Daunt, who came near.

"Well," asked Daunt, uneasily, "what success?"

"Not much, but still something. I don't know the man himself, but I do his friend—one of the worst ruffians that ever haunted the barriers. We shall, I hope, get at what we want through him."

"I have seen the fellow before," said Daunt; "it was he who was watching Fanchette, as I told you, in the Bois, and no doubt acting under orders from the other."

"Precisely; and that other must be a criminal of some mark to secure the services of such a thorough-paced scoundrel as this. But we will get Carapata on our side."

"How?"

"I shall have him arrested within half an hour. I know he is suspected of complicity in those robberies on the Seine. He is one of that band, and we have only hesitated to lay our hands upon him because we wanted to entrap them all at one *coup*."

"Well, but when you have arrested him, how much nearer shall we be to unmasking our friend the marquis?"

"I know this Carapata; he has played *la musique* before now. I have used him as a spy at Mazas, and now, after he has been a few hours in the dépôt of the Prefecture, he will gladly let out the whole story on a promise of being set free."

"But you have not got him yet?"

"That's an easy matter; he is not yet out of sight. Let us walk a little faster, monsieur, and you can assist at the arrest."

A few minutes more and they had overtaken the *voyou*. Daunt, acting under Jobard's instructions, placed himself on one side of

Carapata, Jobard himself ranging upon the other. Two ordinary *sergents de ville*, at a signal from Jobard, followed close behind.

"Resistance is useless," whispered the latter; "we are four to one. You had better come quietly. Walk on without paying any attention until I can get a *fiacre*."

Very soon afterward the detective hailed a passing cab, into which Daunt got first, Carapata followed, and Jobard brought up the rear. The moment the door was shut the prisoner was made safe by means of the *ligotte*, or narrow cord, used instead of handcuffs by the French police, and the whole party went to the dépôt of the Prefecture.

CHAPTER XXVI.

VIÂ CHERBOURG.

CARAPATA maintained a sullen silence after his arrest. He was placed *au secret*, in a solitary cell of the Prefecture that is to say, and interrogated by Jobard, and, indeed, by the *chef* himself, but he would make no disclosures with reference to the mysterious man of the Luxembourg Gardens. Carapata would not even allow that he had seen any such man at all.

"By and by, perhaps, he will change his tune," said M. Acmé, confidently. "He will yet tell us all we want to know."

"What do you propose, monsieur?"

"Turn Carapata into the general prison, and throw him into the way of a particular friend. That friend we will release later on and follow. He will go straight to our man outside, you will see."

"I understand," said M. Jobard, with a look of admiration at his chief.

For the moment the police had lost sight of the marquis, or M. Leon, as I shall call him from henceforth. But they counted on his returning later in the day to the Rue du Bac; and Daunt was intrusted with the task of watching their movements there. Being at home in the house he could do this well, and without arousing suspicion. Accordingly the respectable M. Joliau once more appeared at the hair-dresser's, and politely inquired for *la patronne*.

Madame had gone out for the whole day, M. Maxime, the head-assistant in the shop, told him. She had given herself a holiday. A dear relative had arrived from far, and they were making a little *fête*.

Daunt, satisfied, went up to his own apartment. It was not till evening that he felt a little at fault.

Five, six, seven came and went, and still there was no sign of the pair. What had become of them? Sir Richard felt it was right to let them know at the Prefecture that neither Fanchette nor M. Leon had reappeared.

The fact was the latter wished to avoid the Rue du Bac. He had been greatly unsettled by what had occurred that morning, and already dreaded from Carapata's warning the officious attentions of the French police. Had he followed his first impulse he would have left Paris there and then.

But when the first alarm had passed less cautious counsels prevailed. He could not tear himself away all at once from the flesh-pots, from the grosser and more material delights of Paris.

The day's amusement only ended with the day itself, and it was nearly midnight when Fanchette regained her home. But Fanchette was alone, Mme. Jobard said, on her return; there could be no doubt of that. What, then, had become of her companion?

The fact was, M. Leon's anxieties had increased as the night drew on; he felt more strongly than ever that it would be unsafe to show at the Rue du Bac. Besides, he had his appointment to keep with Carapata at the *cabaret* of Père Barabas, in the Place Maubert. It was of vital importance to hear what the *voyou* had to say.

Driving to the neighborhood of what was once the palace of La Reine Blanche, and is now the lowest quarter of Paris, M. Leon threaded its intricacies with the assurance of one who knew the place by heart.

Père Barabas, the landlord of the most disreputable *cabaret* in that disreputable quarter, eyed his visitor askance as he entered, but a word in his ear soon converted surprise into obsequious attention.

"Carapata? Where is he?" asked Leon, quickly and peremptorily.

"He is not here, monsieur," replied the landlord. "I have not seen him to-night."

"Nor won't," remarked another ruffian of the same stamp as the absentee. "He can't come."

"What!" interrupted M. Leon. "Is that you, Gros Chêne? Where is Carapata?"

"*Emballé!* They brought him to the depot just before I got away."

"When? On what charge? Did he tell you? Did you have any talk?"

"Yes; for a minute or two. He came out into our big room,

and we soon got together. He asked if I knew of any *zig* who was to be free that afternoon, and who could take you a message. I said I could find some one, and, as good luck fell out, they put me myself the right side of the door soon afterward. Insufficient proofs. I didn't want to stay; and here you have me ready to drink your health."

"I don't like the look of it," said M. Leon, musingly. The sudden arrest had increased his misgivings; and why had they set this Gros Chêne free? Had they overheard the question asked by Carapata, and were resolved to follow his messenger?

"But why not release Carapata himself?" asked the marquis, thinking aloud.

"They want him too badly. He is one of Mimi Brule Gueule's band. There was nothing against me."

"It's a ruse, I'm pretty sure. They wished to *filer*" (follow) "Gros Chêne, and see if he joined me."

That Leon or the marquis was right in this conjecture he soon had practical proof.

Just as he was preparing to leave the cabaret a ragged young *gamin*, with active motions and the quick, restless eyes of the Parisian street Arab, ran in with the warning:

"*La Roussel!* The police."

He had detected the approach of a suspicious little party of the sportsmen—the hunters, alike hated and feared—to whom the frequenters of the Place Maubert were perpetual game.

"It is as I thought," said Leon, an evil look coming over his face. "But they shall not take me easily. Let them look out for themselves."

Even as he spoke in walked M. Jobard.

Dead silence fell upon the whole assemblage. Père Barabas only bowed low, and waited for the orders of the representative of the law.

M. Jobard looked round curiously, and examined every face. Then, addressing the marquis, he said:

"A strange place, monsieur, for a gentleman, or, at least, for one so well dressed as yourself. May I ask for your name and domicile, and papers if you have them about you?"

"I am an Englishman. I need no passport. You dare not touch me. I shall appeal to our ambassador."

"You speak very excellent French, monsieur. I wonder where you learned it! Here, Antoine—" this was to one of his assistants

who had remained outside, "step in and see whether you have seen this gentleman before."

M. Jobard turned as he spoke, and gave the marquis his opportunity. With one bound the latter dashed past the police, dealing Jobard a blow with one fist that nearly brought him to the ground, and with the other striking Antoine from his path.

Next instant the marquis was running for dear life down the Rue des Anglais, formerly the Rue des Crimes.

"Give chase!" cried Jobard, frantically, as soon as he recovered himself. "The scoundrel must not escape us like this. He has assaulted the police. Come on, Antoine; do you know him?"

"I am not certain," gasped the other, as he, with the whole posse, pressed on at the heels of the now rapidly disappearing fugitive. "But for his dark hair and beard, both of which may be false, I should say it was Leon Lantimêche, *alias* Tue Tête, the *forçat*."

"Whoever it is we'll have him for the assault. They'll soon hunt up his *dossier*" (antecedents), "at the Prefecture, and he may look out for squalls."

But to catch M. Leon was not so easy. He ran like a greyhound and he doubled like a hare. He knew every street, every alley, every turn, as well as, if not better than, his pursuers, and after half an hour at top speed he had forged so far ahead that the chase was practically at an end.

"He shall not escape us, though," said Jobard, in high dudgeon at being outwitted and outrun, as he reluctantly abandoned the chase.

Leon, as soon as he had distanced his pursuers, paused to take breath. He had to consider what he would do next. How was he to escape from Paris, that rat-trap into which he had so rashly ventured? He was a man of many resources, fertile in expedients, quick to devise and execute a plan. He weighed all his chances as he walked rapidly along, and soon came to a decision. He would start on his journey back to England that very night, leaving Fanchette to join him *en route*, or follow, as circumstances would permit.

It would, of course, be necessary to communicate with her, and his first care was to do that safely, and without compromising himself.

The best plan, then, would be to write to her a prudently worded letter. He must contrive to get it into Fanchette's hands early next morning, and, if possible, unobserved.

He had selected as his temporary residence one of the grandest and most frequented hotels in Paris, well knowing that there he would be the least exposed to the inquisitiveness of official or other busybodies. Mr. Herbert Vivian, a well-to-do English gentleman, as he had called himself on arriving, traveling for his pleasure, was not likely to attract the attention of the police.

Returning there, he wrote as follows:

“DEAR MADAM,—It is with infinite distress that I have to communicate to you that our dear Aunt Angélique lies at the point of death. I have heard this evening from our cousin Anna that our revered relative is not expected to survive to-morrow. Arrangements have been made to administer to her the last sacraments of the Church, and it is her earnest desire that as many as possible of her sorrowing relatives should be present on this sad and solemn occasion. I propose, therefore, to hasten to Mantes at an early hour to-morrow, and shall deem myself fortunate if you are able to accompany me. There is a rapid train which leaves the Ouest station at ten minutes to nine. You should on no account neglect to take this—it is the only one to serve our purpose. Friends will be waiting the arrival of the train at Mantes. I count upon the pleasure of seeing you. As you may have to remain till after the funeral it is as well that you should be prepared to leave your establishment in the charge of Maxime.

“Your attached cousin,

“VICTOR VILLARS.”

Having completed the foregoing, Leon took out his watch and saw that it was half past one. His next business was to arrange for the secure delivery of the letter.

“How early can this letter be taken to its address?” he asked of the head-waiter.

“If monsieur likes I could take it myself when I go off duty at six.”

“The letter must be delivered as soon as possible after six, and without attracting attention. Here, then, are five francs. I will add in the letter that you are to have as many more if you deliver it as I say.”

The matter disposed of, Leon went upstairs to his bedroom and hastily changed his clothes. He had been wearing a frock-coat and tall hat all day, but now he substituted a traveling suit and a soft wide-awake; then, carefully packing and locking his portmanteau, he went down, and again left the hotel.

The clocks were striking two as he walked down the now nearly deserted boulevard toward the Madeleine. It was a beautiful, brilliant summer's night, fine and warm.

"What shall I do—drive or walk? I can get no train at this time of night, and I must not risk leaving Paris till the morning. I shall be more independent, perhaps, if I go on foot." And, having thus settled it, M. Leon set himself bravely to his task.

His way lay by Neuilly. There he crossed the river and made for Courbevoie. A mile beyond he crossed the railway and made for Besons, and there, having again passed the river, he regained the line at Houilles.

"So far so good," he said to himself; "the first train is due here about seven; I will wait for it, then go as far as Poissy and take fresh tickets through to Cherbourg for the two of us. That will throw them off the scent if they think of tracking us on from Mantes. The only point will be to attract Fanchette's attention at Poissy, as she will not expect to see me before Mantes."

He effected this by standing prominently at the glass door of the *salle d'attente* as the Cherbourg express came in. He was the only passenger, and Fanchette, who had seen him plainly, was looking out of the window of a second-class carriage as he came on the platform.

"All right," he said. "Look out for me at Mantes."

There he came and fetched her.

"I have tickets for Cherbourg, first-class. Come, let us change."

They walked along the train looking for seats, and entered a carriage occupied by three young men, Englishmen evidently, all in suits of gray dittoes, with the rather rubicund self-satisfied air of the Briton who had been seeing life.

They scowled after the manner of exclusive Englishmen at M. Leon and Fanchette, as though they wished them at Jericho, and seemed altogether disconcerted and put out by the intrusion.

They had been playing dummy whist, and did not at first like to go on with their game.

After a good deal of whispering and nudging, one of them observed at last in the best Anglo-French:

"*Monsieur, vous n'avez pas objection, j'espère,*" and he produced a pack of cards.

"On the contrary," replied M. Leon, in excellent English. "I am very partial to cards myself. What are you playing?"

"Dummy whist. Will you make a fourth?" asked the first speaker, a florid, overgrown youth, who might have been articulated clerk to a betting-man.

"With all my heart, if my wife will let me," answered Leon, with a laugh at Fanchette.

Next minute the cards were dealt, and they were deep in the game.

It was a curious game. No one seemed to have much notion of whist, Leon least of all. But his opponents held excellent cards, and before they reached Lisieux he had lost three rubbers.

The game went on steadily all the rest of the day. They changed partners again and again, but Leon was always a loser. All the points were low. He must have been at least ten or twelve pounds to the bad.

"I shall have no chance of my revenge," said Leon, gayly. "We are close to Cherbourg, and we may never meet again."

"Cherbourg? How quickly the time has flown. But perhaps you are going over in the boat, sir?" asked the fat youth.

"I am. Are you? Yes?—then we can continue the game on board. You must give me my revenge."

"The idiots; the asses; the double-dyed fools," said M. Leon, with the deepest scorn, to Fanchette, as they were changing from the train to the steamer. "To try and fool me! I, who know every trick in the trade! They shall have their revenge with a vengeance! Listen, Fanchette." And he hastily whispered a few instructions in her ears.

Gambling was forbidden on board the Cherbourg and Weymouth boat, but it was not easy to check the practice. Leon and his new friends got into a quiet corner at the far end of the saloon, and there continued their play.

Suddenly one sprung up, and, with a fierce oath cried, "You sharper, you cheat, you beggarly, rascally, swindling French foreigner! I've caught you in the act."

The others had risen at the first word, and tried hard to pacify their friend.

"Don't you see, you fools? All this while that we've been cursing our luck he has been correcting his fortune. He faces that glass there, and his wife, who sits just behind two of you, has been signaling to him what cards you held. That's why he never doubted when to play or take 'miss.'"

"It's false, you cur! How dare you accuse your betters of foul play? Apologize, or I'll take it out of you. Apologize, I say, or I'll—" And M. Leon advanced threateningly.

"What will you do? Lay a finger on me, you low French villain, you filthy spawn—"

Next instant Leon had him by the throat; there was a short struggle, and the Englishman, before his friends could interpose, was thrown heavily to the ground.

When the two were separated it was found that the Englishman was insensible, and seemed very badly hurt. The news of the disturbance spread rapidly through the steamer; other passengers came crowding into the saloon; then the captain and one of his mates appeared, and after a short colloquy with the Englishmen they fell foul of M. Leon.

The end of it all was, that, on the arrival of the boat at Weymouth, Leon was given into custody on a charge of card-sharping coupled with a murderous assault.

Fanchette was also arrested as an accomplice; and thus the two, in escaping the French, fell into the clutches of the English police, or out of the frying-pan into the fire.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE PLACE MAUBERT.

It is time to let the reader know how Percy Meggitt first became acquainted with Leon Lantimêche, *alias* Tue Tête, *alias* French Joe, *alias* the Marquis de Ojo Verde.

One evening in early April, at Easter in fact, there was an unusual crowd in the *cabaret* of Père Barabas in the Place Maubert.

At one of these tables a little removed from the rest a man sat altogether alone.

A remarkable-looking man in his way, with a hungry, wolfish face, having fierce dark eyes and reddish hair.

While he sat there, slowly sipping his beer, utterly regardless of the turmoil around, there fell upon his ear a sound which suddenly roused him to attention.

It was an Englishman speaking, as the majority of Englishmen do, the French of Stratford-atte-Bow. What had brought so unusual a visitor to this essentially French haunt?

Next minute the man himself entered, accompanied by a small number of friends. He looked a Briton every inch of him, almost of the conventional type. His companions were three in number, *voyous* all of them, evidently *habitués* of the place, anxious to show it off and do the honors. They introduced their English friend to Père Barabas, and invited him to swallow a *coup*.

Meanwhile, half audible remarks passed around the room. Where had Gros Chêne, Pince Nez, and Carapata picked up this Poivreau, this Pierrot, this soft-headed simpleton, who had stepped in there like a fowl to be plucked, perhaps killed in the end?

Our red-haired friend, after the first surprise, remained impassive, scarcely noticing what was going on. The landlord, addressing him as M. Leon, had whispered a few words to him on the disappearance of the party into an inner *salon*, but M. Leon had only shaken his head and shrugged his shoulders in reply.

He clearly saw no reason to interfere.

The Englishman might be left to his fate. "*Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?*"

All at once a sudden commotion arose inside.

Loud voices speaking hastily and in anger were followed by sounds of a struggle, the overthrow of the table, the breaking of glass, and, last of all, a distinct heavy thud—the fall of a body on the floor.

M. Leon, who, from his place near the curtain, as I have said, could hear better than the other, got up from his seat, lifted the green baize curtain, and passed into the inner room.

Inside he found the Englishman with his back to the wall, keeping two assailants at bay with an uplifted chair; at his feet lay a third, Pince Nez, prostrate.

"What's all this?" said M. Leon, in French, in a voice of authority, interposing between the combatants. Then he added in English, abruptly, "Put that chair down. I'll see you out of this."

This diversion only further exasperated the Frenchmen, who were on the point of falling foul of M. Leon when he spoke still louder, in thieves' argot:

"Le Gros Chêne! Carapata! Don't you know me?"

"*Tudieu!*" cried both in haste. "It is our *dabe* (master)."

"It is I, as you see. What has this Englishman done? Let him pass."

"Done! He has cheated us, tricked us, us who are the most honorable players in all Europe. The game was fair until just now, when—" and Gros Chêne poured forth a torrent of words to show how the simple Englishman had attempted to befool them.

"When Greek meets Greek," said M. Leon, with a half-smile. "But there, no more. Let us pass."

"Come on, sir," M. Leon cried rather sharply to the Englishman, "these gentlemen will not detain you further."

And M. Leon, or M. Leon Lantimèche, to state his name in full, passed out into the common tap-room with his *protégé*, whom he hustled with very scant ceremony into a *fiacre* at the door, taking his seat beside him.

"Where do you lodge?" he asked, presently, as the *fiacre* merged upon the Quai Voltaire.

"Hôtel des Danube et Amsterdam, Rue des Bons Enfants. I think I should like to go straight home," said the Englishman.

"Naturally; the night has been exciting, and full of events. I am loath to keep its unpleasant memories alive, and yet I should be glad to know how you gravitated toward the Place Maubert."

"They said they would show me life—the life of Paris which no one sees. I met them in the fur-coat in the Café de la Fontaine. We went to the Salle Valentino and the *bal* at Bullier's. Then they asked me if I would like to go the rounds of Paris, to thieves' lodging-houses, and places unknown to strangers, and that's how I found myself in the Place Maubert."

"I think you may congratulate yourself that I was there too," said M. Leon, quietly. "Monsieur—"

"Meggitt, Percy Meggitt, of Waldo's, Mincing Lane. Allow me to say at once that I am extremely obliged to you, and if you will call to-morrow at my hotel I shall be glad to offer you some more substantial mark of my gratitude."

"Monsieur Meggitt, a man of my stamp does not accept rewards for doing what is right," said M. Leon, with dignity. "I am more than repaid already," he added, touching the region of his right breast-pocket.

The gesture conveyed the idea that he gloried in an honest heart; but, with a fine irony, that was lost on Meggitt, he really meant that he had helped himself to the Englishman's purse, by picking his pocket as he hustled him into the cab.

Mr. Meggitt did not discover the theft till he got out and prepared to pay the fare.

"I have been robbed," he cried, in mingled rage and consternation. "My pocket-book is gone; I would not have lost it for worlds, and I can not pay the *fiacre*."

"Do not distress yourself, monsieur. I will do that for you. Indeed," he added, *sotto voce*, "it is the least I can do. So good-night, and good-bye, monsieur."

His first step when quite alone was to take out the Englishman's pocket-book and thoroughly overhaul its contents.

He looked first for cash, and found several napoleons, also an English sovereign or two. There was besides a letter of credit or circular note for £50, payable at Messrs. John Arthur's.

"Fourteen hundred francs! *Assez bon le magot!* What else have we? Papers, letters, notes of little affairs. A man of method,

this Mr. Meggitt, and business-like, but perhaps a little imprudent. Too much detail, *mon cher monsieur*," he gently whispered, as he read a few of the papers. "Why write all these things down? See what comes of it. You lose your purse, I pick it up; it becomes mine—mine with all it contains. Your little secrets, your private habits, pleasures, and ways of life—not so very honest and reputable I fear—I know them all. Ah, Monsieur Meggitt, this is a precious pocket book to you. Now I can understand why you were so disheartened at losing it. You shall have it back, *mon cher*. I will restore it to you by and by, and claim my reward."

The loss of that pocket-book put Meggitt completely in his power. It placed the assistant-cashier entirely at the mercy of a much bigger rogue. From that night in the Place Maubert dated a close confederacy between two villains, and a series of financial operations, which, from their first inception through all their artful and intricate ramifications, deeply affected the principal personages in this veracious story.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LEON'S LUCK.

WE left Leon and Fanchette in the hands of the police at Weymouth, arrested on a charge of card-sharping on board the Cherbourg boat.

Nothing could be made out of Leon. Where had he come from? Whither was he going? Who was this woman? his wife? What was his name?

All that he would acknowledge was that his name was George.

"George what?" they asked him.

"George George."

"And madame's name?"

"The same?"

The evidence against both was sufficient to justify their commitment to the county jail at Dorchester for trial at the next quarter sessions.

En route Leon repeated his caution to Fanchette.

"Not a word, remember; you know no English, no more do I. Our name is George."

"Oh, Leon!" she said, "what fresh trouble is in store for us? Ever since we first met—Leon—!"

"*Tais toi*," replied the other, sternly. "They are watching us."

The arrival of such well dressed, distinguished-looking prisoners—foreigners, too—caused quite a sensation in Dorchester Jail.

"He isn't what he makes himself out, that's perfectly plain," the governor insisted. "There's some mystery about him, I'm sure; why the silver cigarette-case has a coronet on it, and so has his watch, and his wife's diamonds—"

"Is she his wife, do you think?" asked the chaplain, inclined to be uncharitable.

"You'd better ask him. I don't speak French."

"No more do I. We'll ask Father D'Arcy"—this was the Roman Catholic priest attached to the prison—"he was at St. Omer, I believe."

But Father D'Arcy could not help much.

"The fellow won't talk to me. When I asked him his name he persisted in saying it was George. But I feel sure he is some *fils de famille*, some man of good family who wants to preserve an *incognito*."

"That's what I say," declared the governor.

"I think he's a humbug," said the chaplain, "no more a Frenchman than I am. Probably has previous convictions against him, and is trying to escape recognition. Have you sent round any inquiry to other prisons, and to the police? He ought to be photographed."

But this was an indignity to which Leon would not submit. He refused, for reasons of his own, to be photographed, and, being still unconvicted, no coercion could be employed to make him sit.

Force being forbidden, stratagem was tried, and with success. Leon took his exercise daily in the prison-yard, upon which many of the prison cells looked. As the prisoner was walking round one morning he was "halted" suddenly, while the governor entered and asked him if he had any complaints.

At this moment Leon was standing opposite one of the cell-windows on the ground-floor. The window of this cell had been taken out, and the lens of a camera was fitted just into the aperture.

Leon thus was photographed unawares; an excellent likeness was printed off and circulated, with the official inquiry-form, by the prison authorities.

Meanwhile the time for quarter sessions arrived, and Leon awaited his trial with marked impatience and anxiety.

"He's always bothering about something," said the priest one

day, who had come to be Leon's regular interpreter. Besides, Leon claimed to be one of his flock.

"What does he want now?" asked Captain Scrooby, the governor.

"To be allowed to have a hair-dresser in from the town."

The governor, after much hesitation, consented, and a hair-dresser was sent for.

The outsider came once, twice, three times, but on the last occasion the governor, whose suspicions had been aroused by these frequent visits, had the man stopped at the gate and searched.

On the man's third visit two bottles containing a dark fluid were found on him.

"Spirits," said the gate porter, a sententious old man, "colored brown."

"Poison!" cried Captain Scrooby; "send for the surgeon; we don't want any suicides here. Lucky we found it out. You scoundrel"—this to the barber—"how dare you bring it in?"

"It's only hair-dye, captain, I do assure you. He did so beg and pray—"

"What, in French? Do you understand that lingo!"

"Well, sir, not much, but he made signs, and, as his hair was turning lighter, I soon made out his meaning."

"His hair turning color?" cried the governor, "then there is a mystery in the man, and a bigger one than we thought; but I think we have the clw. This explains the answer from Chatham Prison."

A reply had come from that well known convict establishment to the effect that the photograph forwarded with the inquiry-form of a prisoner in custody at Dorchester Jail would have been recognized as that of a man Joseph Devas, released a year or more on ticket-of-leave, but that there was a discrepancy in the description given.

As recorded in the prison-books at Chatham the prisoner's hair was red, a deep strong red; in the description received from Dorchester Jail the hair was given as jet black.

The value of Leon's hair-dye was in fact evaporating, and he had endeavored to renew the application. He had won over the hair-dresser by offering him £5. He wrote it thus on a piece of the paper provided to help him in preparing his defense, and the money was to be paid after the trial.

But, as we have seen, the attempt failed, and, in the few days

still intervening between the sessions, Leon's hair had reverted to its original and natural color.

The trial was not a long affair. The case was clear against the male prisoner, George, and the witnesses unanimous in their evidence. He was found guilty on the lesser count, and prepared himself to face the worst—a short imprisonment on a charge of card-sharping; two or three months, the bench would hardly give him more.

Great was his surprise, then, when the chairman, prior to passing sentence, asked the usual questions: Was anything known against the prisoner? were there any previous convictions? and so forth.

“Four previous convictions, sir,” said the clerk, reading off a paper; and the remark made Leon start. A close observer would have seen now that the prisoner's pretended ignorance of English was assumed.

“He was convicted at Hull in 1865 of fraud and embezzlement, and sentenced to six calendar months; at Liverpool, in 1867, of turf frauds, twelve months; at Leeds Assizes in 1869 for swindling and card-sharping, three months; and at the Central Criminal Court in 1870 for forgery, and sentenced to seven years' penal servitude.”

Leon's face had grown ghastly pale.

“Under what names?” asked the chairman.

“He was known first as Devas—Joseph Devas. That's supposed to be his real name. But he has many aliases—Philadelphia Joe, French Joe, the Marquis, Leon Lantimèche, etc. He is said to have undergone several imprisonments abroad, chiefly in France, and to be well known to the French police.”

“Who speaks to the previous convictions?”

“An officer from Chatham—principal warder Boag.”

The warder, a tall, straight, commanding-looking man in a blue uniform, stepped into the witness-box, and gave his statement in a short business-like manner.

“I identify the prisoner as Joseph Devas, x 79,837; received at Chatham Convict Prison on the 3d January, 1871, and released on license on the 20th of March, 1875.”

“He is a ticket-of-leave man then?” asked the bench.

“Yes, sir, with one year's sentence still unexpired.”

“But if his license is revoked, as it assuredly must be, he must do what remained when he was let out, I think. Is not that so, Mr. Wassell?”

The clerk indorsed the chairman's view.

"Then I shall deal leniently with the prisoner in the present case. He will have six months' imprisonment, to commence at the termination of his penal servitude. That will give him nearly three years to do. Remove the prisoner."

And Leon, who still posed as a Frenchman, indignantly denying the allegations of the prisoner-warder which had been interpreted to him, was carried back to his cell.

Fanchette's cause was next disposed of. Her complicity was clear; wife or no wife she was evidently the other's accomplice. Still, there was nothing known against her, so the chairman told her he would pass only a nominal sentence—fourteen days.

Fanchette was also taken back to the jail, where she was to undergo her short punishment. There, before her release, Leon, well versed in prison ways, very fertile in expedients, brought about a meeting between them.

But no orders were given for the attendance of an interpreter, and as Leon had silenced the warder's scruples, the conversation took place in French.

"What did you get?" was Leon's first query, put, as I have said, in French.

"Only fourteen days."

"All is not lost, then—but it will depend entirely upon you. As soon as you are released, make your way to London."

"What am I to do in London?"

"You must see Percy. He lives now in Victoria Square. Go there—no, make him come to you."

"Where?"

"The safest place will be at the old shop, mamzelle's, behind the Hôtel Gaillard. Tell him I have been copped, that I am going back to the 'boat' (penal servitude), "and that I shall be away about three years—unless he can help me out before then."

"What? help you to escape? How is he to manage that?"

"That's his affair—it will be worse for him if he leaves me in jail. Until I am free I won't stir a finger, as I say. So tell him that, plain."

"And after that, when I have seen Percy, may I go back to Paris?"

"I think not, it won't be safe. They may 'want' you on the other side. Percy, too, would like to lay his hand on you, perhaps, if he fails to help me. No: you had better keep close. Hide somewhere, till I can come and join you. Leave a letter at mamzelle's."

"Is that all?"

"Pretty well all. I can think of nothing else—except, perhaps, about that young fellow—"

But here the warder, who was attending at the interview, said that time was up. Leon and Fanchette exchanged farewells, and each went back to his and her own cell.

Meanwhile, Mr. Percy Meggitt had been profoundly uneasy. What had become of the marquis?

The days passed by, first one week, then two, then three, and still no news came from his confederate and guilty partner. What did it mean?

"What if he has played me false!" went on Meggitt, yielding to more gloomy forebodings.

From the first he had been merely a tool in the hands of the arch-rogue—an instrument of evil working out blindly the dictates of a stronger and more unscrupulous will. The marquis alone held all the threads of the conspiracy, and Meggitt was almost powerless in the absence of the master-mind.

All that the cashier could do was to look into his personal liabilities, and to ascertain, if possible, how far he was compromised by the fraudulent operations of his friend.

Day after day, long after closing hours and far into the night, he sat there, in the back-parler, poring over ledgers, comparing, extracting, calculating, till he had covered pages and pages with figures, and still he could not come to any satisfactory conclusion. The balance was always against him, and to an amount that made his hair stand on end.

One evening—it was the very day of Leon's trial at Dorchester—Meggitt, feeling more than hopeless of the future, sat alone in his little dining-room in Victoria Square. He had dined copiously, for the cashier was fond of the pleasures of the table, and the more nearly ruin impended the more eagerly did he fly to self-indulgence for temporary relief. He was finishing a second bottle of Perrier Jouet '74, and was on the point of retiring when a tardy ring at the front door was followed by a very noisy knock.

His man soon came in with a letter. It was from Barrable, Mr. Dandy's confidential butler.

"HONORED SIR," it said—"Master has had a stroke. He has asked twice for you—can you come at once? The doctor fears poor master can not survive the night,

"Respectfully yours,

J. BARRABLE."

The messenger had come in one of Mr. Dandy's broughams, and was waiting.

Meggitt hastily put on an overcoat, jumped into the carriage, and was driven off.

How would it affect him—this was his first thought—if anything happened to Mr. Dandy? He feared the worst. There would probably be an end to the firm of Candlent, Dandy, and Waldo, or such new arrangements that a full investigation of the condition of the bank would be indispensable. Meggitt had reason to dread any, even the most formal, inquiry, if conducted independently of him. These fears oppressed him so seriously that he was quite agitated and unnerved by the time he reached Wimbledon.

Mr. Barrable and others construed his distress into real anxiety for the senior partner, and thought all the better of Meggitt for it. They quite sympathized with him, and with the great grief he displayed at hearing that his good kind friend was already dead.

Yes, Mr. Dandy had gone off quite quietly, beyond a few almost unintelligible words.

Next day the news reached the Waldos.

Mr. Waldo went in and disturbed his wife long before her regular hour—much to her disgust.

"My dear, I have had the most awful news. Mr. Dandy is—dead."

"Dead!" shrieked the lady. "How? When did it happen? Where? From whom have you heard?"

"Meggitt; he was sent for, it seems. Poor old Dandy asked for him—"

"That was as it should be," said Mrs. Waldo, off her guard.

"I can not see why, upon my word. Meggitt is nothing particular to him. He might as well have sent for you."

"Me? Mr. Waldo, what do you mean?"

"I mean that I don't see why Meggitt should be sent for. However, he was there, for he writes me himself to tell me the sad news."

"What will Dandy do with all his money?" asked Mrs. Waldo, abruptly, and with such want of feeling that even submissive old Waldo was shocked.

"How can I tell? He would please himself, you may be sure, in making his dispositions. But as regards the bank, and his share therein, I do happen to know something, for he consulted me some little time ago; I suppose, when he was making his will."

"Yes?" asked Mrs. Waldo, much interested; "what were his intentions?"

"He asked me if I saw any objection to his making Meggitt—you know we had every reason to be satisfied with the young man—a partner by will."

"And you agreed?"

"I had no alternative. However, Meggitt has been an excellent servant of the bank, and I was rejoiced to hear Mr. Dandy's proposal."

"Then he will now be a partner?"

"Yes; unless Mr. Dandy has changed his mind. As to the rest of the property I am completely in the dark."

Mr. Dandy's will was short and to the purpose. It dealt first with the possessions that the deceased had most dearly prized—his collection of pictures, statuary, and articles of *virtu*. These were left *en bloc* to the nation. "I have little else to leave," the will went on. "but, after the following legacies have been paid, I hereby appoint my young friend and *proté é*, Percy Meggitt, residuary legatee."

A separate paragraph dealt with the share and partnership in the bank, which Mr. Dandy also left to Percy Meggitt, "being convinced that the integrity, intelligence, and industry he has ever displayed in the service of the bank will be no less conspicuous when at its head."

"It is more than I ever dreamed of," said Meggitt to Mr. Waldo; "I never anticipated, sir, never—believe me—that I should rise to be a member of the firm."

No, Mr. Percy Meggitt, but your good fortune comes a little too late in the day; you are succeeding now to a property which you have done your best to undermine and destroy; all these lost thousands, the embezzlements and defalcations which have gone to enrich another rogue, were partly your own. It is a strange Nemesis which makes you a principal sufferer by the nefarious transactions in which you so readily engaged.

"It will be necessary to prepare deeds of partnership," went on Mr. Waldo; "I will speak to Claytus, and a balance-sheet must be drawn up, to date."

"Is the latter indispensable?" asked Meggitt, with an inward qualm. "I mean that I am quite ready to accept my position as I find it. I think I know something of the affairs of the bank," he added, with a greasy smile.

"So be it, Meggitt;" and exposure was for the moment postponed.

Still Meggitt was terribly anxious to know what amount of ready cash could be utilized promptly in staving off a financial crisis.

"Mr. Dandy does not leave much behind him, Meggitt. He was not a saving man, and spent a great deal on art; he drew his income from the bank regularly, but, so far as I know, had no other means."

Mr. Waldo's surmise proved correct. It was a bitter disappointment to him to find when everything was settled, every penny realized, that only a few thousand pounds remained—a sum barely sufficient to meet the more immediate calls.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FANCHETTE'S MISSION.

DAUNT was greatly surprised when he heard Fanchette had left Paris. He was as much annoyed when he heard that Jobard had let the marquis slip through his fingers. They told him this, and all about M. Leon Lantimêche, at the Prefecture, who had been recognized at last by the Police. It was some days, however, before they tracked the two fugitives to the Cherbourg boat. Then Daunt thought it high time to leave Paris.

His departure was hastened by a letter from Josephine, in which she informed him of the disappearance of Bob. She had heard nothing of him or from him for nearly a fortnight.

One letter she had received the morning after his visit to the Junior Belgrave, and it told how he had waited on the men he wished to watch, and how he had heard amidst much balderdash something that might be useful to the cause he and Josephine had so much at heart. Bob also said that as Meggitt and the marquis were going to the Waldos' ball he also meant to be there in the same or another disguise.

And that was the last she had heard of him. Something terrible must have happened. The guilty wretches dreading detection had not scrupled to do him grievous bodily harm.

Daunt, lover-like, flew at once to her side. He halted an hour or two at Chatham, seeking to calm her apprehensions, then hastened on to town.

Tummond, who met him at the Albany, told him all he knew.

"Whatever happened to Bob," thought Daunt, "must have been on his way home through the park. I wonder whether the constables on these beats saw anything odd that early morning? I must consult Faske," said Sir Richard as the end of his reflections.

Next morning Daunt saw the detective and detailed Bob's disappearance and the circumstances which preceded it.

"He was after that same fellow that you saved me from in Seven Dials"

"Was he? Why?"

"We are trying to redress a grievous wrong, one in which you had some hand—the conviction of the cashier at Waldo's; and this young fellow is old Surtees's son."

Faske winked knowingly.

"Do your best, sir. It's natural you should try, but when judge and jury have gone against a man it ain't much use, in my experience. But if not presuming may I ask what is your line?"

"The conviction was erroneous for reasons that I know we shall soon be able to prove."

"If you are so positive there may be something in it; yet I am doubtful, I am free to confess. The case was all so clear."

"You told me you thought you knew this fellow in Seven Dials?"

"I did; and I do still; although I don't quite see how it can be my man. He was half a Frenchman, who got seven years."

"For some sort of bank-forgery or swindling? Known as Lantimèche, real name Devas; supposed to have been in several French prisons? but more recently he has been going into the best of society as a Cuban Count or Marquis de Ojo Verde."

"Meggitt's friend, whose name was mentioned at the trial?"

"The same; and I have been hunting him up ever since."

Faske was nursing his leg and looking at his shoe string with the old air of abstraction.

"I begin to see your line, Sir Richard. Do you happen to have found out anything about the French maid, Fanchette?"

"She is nothing more than a creature of the marquis."

The shoe-string again required so much attention.

"If it wasn't for our finding the bonds in the old man's own deed-box I should begin to smell a rat."

"I hope we shall yet be able to explain that. Meanwhile, they have caught poor Bob, and I am most anxious and unhappy about him. He may be sacrificed."

"We must institute an active search—beat up this Frenchman's

quarters. He has friends in Seven Dials; I know him and them, and the places they haunt. Wait a day or two, Sir Richard, and I sha'll have something to tell you."

"Don't forget the constables who were on duty in the park on the morning of the 19th—we ought to start from that point."

Faske called again at the Albany in a couple of days.

"I have news, Sir Richard, strange and unexpected news. Our man is in custody at Dorchester on a charge of card-sharping on board the Cherbourg boat, and his black hair is turning red for want of dye. Fanchette is in custody, too, as a confederate. But there is little known against her, and she will get a light sentence. I dare say Lantimêche will try to communicate with his pals through her. She must be watched from the moment she leaves prison. Some one must go down to Dorchester."

"I will go down to Weymouth and stay there till the trial is over."

"That will do well, Sir Richard. We shall get the straight tip through Fanchette, you'll see."

The reader is already informed of the fate that overtook Leon and Fanchette. The plans of the former, and the course marked out to the latter, have also been detailed. That Faske was pretty right in his conjectures will be readily understood from these plans.

On the fourteenth morning after the trial Fanchette was released. She walked to the station at once, and took a second-class to Waterloo. Daunt was there watching, and he promptly followed her into a second-class carriage when the train came; but he was careful not to enter into conversation with her until he was distinctly encouraged.

There was something in the sound of his voice that made Fanchette start as he answered her simple question as to how long the train would be in getting to London, and she looked at him very keenly.

But he spoke as she did, in matter-of-fact English, and it was impossible that this should be her attached admirer whom she had deserted in the Rue du Bac.

"Does mademoiselle propose to go far?" asked Daunt, politely.

"Yes, monsieur, I am going on to London."

"*En route* to Paris, I suppose?"

"Oh, no, monsieur; I shall make some stay. I have friends there."

"Ah! It was, no doubt, in London that mademoiselle learned English so perfectly."

"Yes," she answered, vaguely. "There and elsewhere. But what brings you"—again she had been looking at him very closely—"in these parts?"

"Do you know me?" asked Daunt, with inward misgivings.

"I recognized you directly. I have seen you at Mr. Waldo's, Sir Richard Daunt."

This was a distinct relief.

"Are you, too, going to London?" she asked, evidently still suspicious.

"Oh, no!"—he saw Fanchette's face brighten. The meeting, then, was not intentional—"I shall change at Bishopstoke. I am going to stay at a house near there."

Fanchette seemed quite relieved by this announcement, and chatted away very pleasantly, about her life at the Waldos, about Paris—if she had only known!—and many other things, till Bishopstoke was reached.

There Daunt got out, as he had said; but his first care was to find and make himself known to the guard.

"If the lady in the carriage I have left gets cut at any station short of Waterloo wire for me to 'Faske, Scotland Yard. Alighted at —' Do you understand?" Such a question, accompanied by half a sovereign, could only be answered in one way; then Daunt, pretty sure that this colloquy had not been observed by Fanchette, waved his adieus to her as the train rattled off.

There was another train a quarter of an hour later which Daunt meant to take; but before he started he sent a lengthy telegram to Faske:

"She left by the 8.55 this morning; traveled with her as far as Bishopstoke, but for good reasons have left the train. She is due at Waterloo at 1.26. Have some one there to meet and follow her. I shall arrive at 2.10."

Faske came up to Sir Richard when he reached town.

"It's all right. Two of my men are at her heels. Come with me to Scotland Yard—one of them will return there with news of her when there's any to tell."

They had not long to wait. Within half an hour they heard that Fanchette had gone straight from the station to the Hôtel Gaillard.

"That place has two exits," cried Faske, angrily; "Simon ought to have known that, and you should have stayed."

"The landlord's squared. But she won't leave just yet. She's

sent a message into the city by hand; expects some one to come and see her, I believe."

"Meggitt, of course!" exclaimed both Daunt and Faske, in a breath.

"We must follow her; gain admittance by fair means or foul!" cried the detective.

"Leave that to me," said Sir Richard, quietly; "but I must go back to my chambers first."

Daunt and Faske's surmise was perfectly right. Fanchette had sent for Meggitt, and Meggitt's answer was that he would call at the Hôtel Gaillard at once.

He came, and, asking for Madame Poirat, was shown by several dark winding passages into the basement of the house.

"Why are you bringing me down here?" asked Meggitt, feeling a little uneasy.

"It's all right; Madame Poirat is on a visit to mamzelle. Take care of the steps."

The room he entered at length was a small kitchen, not used as such, but furnished with some pretense at comfort. This was mamzelle's private apartment, which she occupied when not busy with her lodgers—the scum which overflowed for greater security from the Hôtel Gaillard.

Fanchette was seated there, waiting.

"Where is Leon?" asked Meggitt, abruptly.

Fanchette rapidly ran over all their adventures from the day she left Paris and joined Leon.

"A disreputable gambling row! what could Leon be thinking off? and now, when so much depended on his presence? It's most disastrous, most fatal. Worse than ruin is imminent. Without him my position is untenable—"

"You need Leon's help, then?" Fanchette said, coldly.

"What's that?" asked Meggitt. "Something like a knock or hammering in a cellar or inner kitchen."

"Rats, probably," replied Fanchette.

"Leon alone can save me," went on Meggitt, thinking no more of the interruption. "He must let me know at once where he has deposited the large sums got from the bank, and must allow me to draw on them. You have come to tell me where they are?"

Fanchette shook her head.

"Leon has sent you a message by me—but not that."

"What then?"

"Leon knows your difficulty; but he will not stir a finger to

help you unless you help him. He could escape, somehow, if only he had assistance from outside. It must come from you "

"What can I do?" he said, looking up at last; "help him to escape? It's so risky, so uncertain. Fanchette, do you know where this money is? I see you know. For Heaven's sake tell me—name your price."

"And sell Leon?" replied Fanchette, smiling contemptuously. "Suppose I tell him of your chivalrous offer?"

"Fanchette, you are a fool to cling to this man; why are you so devoted to him?"

"I care for no other man. He has promised to marry me as soon as he is free. I have loved him always, from the first, and now I am to have my reward."

Meggitt laughed aloud.

"How many women I wonder has he befooled! And you all believe him! It's past understanding."

"Has Leon deceived me—how do you know?" Fierce jealousy blazed at once into the hot-blooded Frenchwoman's eyes.

"Can it be possible that you trust him further than you can see? Why, only the night before he left for Paris I heard him swearing eternal love to—"

"To whom?" cried Fanchette, as she seized Meggitt by the wrist.

"Augusta Waldo. I heard it all myself."

"It's a false, wicked lie. I will not believe it."

"I asked him if he meant to marry her. 'Why not?' he answered; 'she's fresh, young, and fair; I like them so; Fanchette is too dark for my taste!'"

Fanchette almost screamed with rage.

"The traitor! the cur!" she hissed.

"You can not stick to him after that," went on Meggitt, who had closely watched the effect of his words. "Why not tell me where the money is? I will make it well worth your while."

"Unhappily I do not know. Leon keeps his own counsel."

"As about Augusta Waldo," suggested Meggitt, desirous of adding force to Fanchette's wrath.

"Those Waldos! How I hate them all. The mother, with her grand airs, her pretensions. She—faugh! If you only knew. But why should I not tell you?"

"About Mrs Waldo?" asked Meggitt, in astonishment.

Again the noise in the neighboring cellar. But the pair in the kitchen were too full of their own affairs to pay any heed.

"Listen, monsieur. Do you remember much about your early days—your childhood? your mother?"

"I was an orphan—from my birth, they told me."

"It was a lie; your father and mother are both alive. I know it for a fact. I have had all the letters which prove it in my hands. Fool that I was to part with them!"

"Fanchette, you must be dreaming: what wild nonsense is this?"

"It is as I say: your mother is alive, and, so far as I know, your father, although they go by different names, and, as I believe, are barely friends."

"Her name—tell me my mother's name."

"Waldo. That proud, conceited woman! *Mon Dieu!* Why did I not humble her—?"

Fanchette was thinking more of herself than of the startling surprise she had given Meggitt.

"Gracious God!" he cried at last. "It is past belief; and my father—quick! What is his name?"

"Dandy; one of your *associés* at the bank."

"Mr. Dandy!" exclaimed Meggitt. "This explains all."

"It's the truth, monsieur, exactly the truth. Ask Madame Waldo. She will not dare deny you."

Meggitt rose from his seat, and strode up and down the room without speaking.

"It is cruel, infamous; but I will be even with her yet. But there"—he said, mastering his rage, "all that must keep. As to Leon, you say he will let me know how I may help him."

Fanchette did not answer.

"When is he to leave Dorchester? How can I assist him best? By sending there to watch? What did Leon say?"

"I care not: nor whether he is released at all. I shall not mix myself more with that false traitor or his affairs. I do not wish to see him again. I shall go back."

"Where?"

"To Paris; I was happy there; contented with my lot. I might have settled in life; a good honest man, *un homme de bien*, would have married me, when Leon, that devil, reappeared, and lured me away. But it is all over now. He had better keep away. If he or you, monsieur, seek to trouble me—*gare*. You comprehend?"

"What will you do?"

"What lies in my power to bring you both to justice. I can,

you know; you are both in my power, and unless I am left tranquil I will send you both to the *bagne*."

"If it is to be war between us, Fanchette, and you do seem bent on mischief, there is another, if not a stronger reason for helping Leon to escape—we can manage you, not him."

"Bah! his power is gone, and I have other protectors and friends."

As she spoke a step was heard descending the stairs. It was a waiter from the Hôtel Gaillard, with a card, which he handed to Fanchette.

"Monsieur Jolian! here in England, impossible! There, Mr. Meggitt, did I not tell you I had friends?"

"Who is this man?" asked Meggitt, suspiciously.

"A countryman of mine, a rich, respectable *bourgeois* of Paris, who will escort me home. Go, monsieur; I have nothing more to say to you."

"Where can I see you again, here or in Paris?"

"Ask Leon," replied Fanchette, mockingly, "next time you see him. *Adieu*."

As she showed Meggitt out M. Jolian was shown in.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MISSING BROTHER.

"MONSIEUR JOLIAU!" said Fanchette, wreathing her lips in smiles, "this is a joy as great as it is unexpected. What brings you to this hateful city?"

"Ah, madame! would that I might say it was your *beaux yeux*; but, alas, candor compels me to confess that I came on business, and it was mere chance that brings me the pleasure of a meeting, madame."

"Chance, what lucky chance?"

"I am lodging near here, and I saw you pass an hour ago."

"I am rejoiced to see you. Ah, monsieur, I am very sick of all this; I long for rest, for peace and quiet."

"But what brings you to London, madame?"

"Affairs of succession. I inherited a little something from a relative, and part of the money is here, invested in English *rentes*."

"My compliments, madame is fortunate," said Jolian with a pleasant laugh. "Madame is now a good *partie*, I suppose?"

"Oh, monsieur, no! But I have wherewithal to live, and added to another similar fortune two people would be rich."

There was no mistaking this speech. Joliau seemed encouraged to the extent of taking her hand.

At this moment the knocking or hammering which had interrupted Fanchette and Meggitt was again heard in the neighboring cellar.

"What can that be?" asked M. Joliau, very naturally, but with a sudden suspicion.

"Rats, I believe. I have heard them several times since I have been down here."

"Whose room is this?" asked Joliau, rather changing his tone from the persuasive to the peremptory.

"My *patronne* sits here. She kindly offered it to me to receive my friends. You were saying, *cher monsieur*—" and Fanchette gently tried to lure her suitor back to his intended declaration.

Joliau—alias Daunt—was a little puzzled. He had come there to discover what he could about Bob, not to make love to Fanchette, yet he could not well afford to break with her.

While he still debated, still holding Fanchette's hand, as though in an ecstasy of silent bliss, there came a fresh rapping, a knocking, or whatever it was in the inner room.

"Do you hear, Madame Poirat? That noise again, it is very odd; can there be any one in there? Any one listening to what we say?"

Fanchette looked uneasily toward the cellar-door. Except when her blood was up and she was rendered reckless by passion she could never quite shake herself free from dread at the far-reaching power of Leon.

"I will see who is there," insisted her companion, as he proceeded to examine the door.

"It is locked and bolted—outside, strange!" and Daunt put his ear to the key-hole. "I must sift the matter to the bottom," he went on, in the same peremptory tone. "Where is the woman of the house? Fetch her."

"You had better find her yourself, monsieur; I do not like your tone or your manner."

Daunt hesitated for a moment, doubting whether it would be safe to leave Fanchette alone. Then he went as far as the door and called out sharply,

"Mamzelle! Mamzelle!"

In a few minutes a heavy step was heard descending the stairs,

and the same stout fiery-faced woman appeared who had answered the door to Daunt a month or two before.

"Who wants me?" she asked angrily, in her high-pitched voice, with an American accent.

"I want to go in here—open quick," said Daunt in French.

"Who are you? By what right do you ask?"

"I come from Leon Lantimèche. Make haste."

"Be careful," interposed Fanchette hastily in English, thinking M. Joliau would not understand; "it is some plot. This gentleman knows nothing of Leon."

She was still wavering and could not easily withdraw her allegiance from the man who had so long held her in thrall.

"Make haste, I say!" repeated Daunt, upon whose quick ears fell fresh and more frenzied shouts from within. "Give me the key or open it yourself."

In his excitement he also spoke in English.

"Who are you?" cried Fanchette.

"You will soon know," as he sprung out of the kitchen, closing the door and locking it behind him.

A few steps took him to where Faske and his assistants were waiting outside the house.

"Come on, Faske; I have run him to ground I hope, but there is no time to lose."

The party led by Daunt hurried down-stairs and re entered the kitchen, where the two women were still cowering in a corner.

"Now," said Faske, "you know me, mamzelle, and why I am here; give me the key."

Very reluctantly she surrendered it; the door was unlocked, the bolts drawn back, and Daunt ran in.

His instincts had not misled him. Bob Surtees was there, lying half-fainting on a miserable mattress on the floor.

It was a dimly-lighted, disgusting den, a back-kitchen opening into a scullery, but nowhere communicating with the open air. The light came from a bull's-eye, like that over a coal-cellar, but probably fixed at the bottom of a narrow deep area. Any one shut in here was effectually cut off from the outer world, as much forgotten here in the heart of London as though he lay in some loathsome subterranean *oubliette*.

Faske and Daunt carried Bob out at once into the kitchen and upstairs.

It was some time before Bob recovered his speech.

"I thought I should never come out of that place alive," he said

at length. "They attacked me in the park—men I had never seen before, and who must have made me insensible. When I came to myself I was in that dark filthy hole alone."

"Were you ill-used?"

"Only when I shouted too loud. They came then, and swore to kill me."

"And you made no attempt to escape?"

"I was always thinking of it, but how was I to get out? The cellar had no exit; I was watched, too; and, until to day, whenever I knocked some one always appeared. It was because no one came in to stop me that I kept at it so to-day. I thought there might be a chance—that strangers perhaps were there."

"They had left Fanchette alone for a private talk with Meggitt."

Bob looked surprised; he could not take it in quite.

"There is much for you to hear, Bob. But come, can you bear to be moved, do you think—to my chambers, say, in the Albany?"

"Stay, Sir Richard," interposed Faske. "I think we must settle with these women first; they ought to be taken into custody."

"Can't you wait a little? I don't want anything done prematurely, at least not until we have the whole case completed."

"What case?" asked Faske, knowing perfectly well.

"The reversal of the sentence against Mr. Surtees, the evidence for which I am collecting, and which is fast growing in my hands."

Faske shook his head. "At least let me ask the French maid a few questions."

"I hope Madame Poirat bears Monsieur Joliau no malice," he said, laughingly. He had long since taken off his wig and glasses.

"Who is addressing me—Monsieur Joliau, or Sir Richard Daunt?"

"The latter. Listen attentively. You have some information that I want. Give it to me, and I will make it well worth your while."

"I do not sell information, or my friends," replied Fanchette, loftily.

"Only your enemies, Mrs. Waldo for example; shall I tell her you—stole—those letters, for which she paid you a large sum?"

Fanchette started.

"Do you know what is the penalty of *chantage* in this country—of extorting money by threats? Five years at the very least, so take care."

"Why do you persecute me, monsieur? I have already told you, as Monsieur Joliau, that I do not dare divulge anything."

Daunt, despairing, took Faske aside, and they had a whispered conference.

"I shall get no good out of her here."

"What do you propose, then?"

"To let her go, but keep a close watch over her, so that we may lay hands on her directly the moment arrives. She will go back to Paris, I expect, and there I can make it perfectly certain that she will be produced if required."

"All right, we will withdraw, then, without further action. Good-day, ladies," said the detective, in a mocking tone, "perhaps you'll hear of us again. So look out for squalls."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SECRETS OF THE BANK.

ONE of the first steps taken after Bob had regained strength, was to pay a visit, in company with Daunt, to young Driffield. The conversation overheard at the Junior Belgrave indicated that the clerk was in possession of some damaging facts.

Driffield hesitated, but when he heard he might help poor old Surtees, for whom he had a strong regard, he told all he knew about Flemings and the bills.

Very soon after business had commenced next day Sir Richard was closeted with one of the partners in the greatest banking-house in Europe.

Daunt without hesitation told the whole story.

"It is mainly surmise at present," said the great banker, "or at most strong suspicion. The only tangible fact is about these bills of—of—thank you, Flemings of Manchester. I don't seem to know the name of Flemings of Manchester, but that might easily happen. But I will have the matter looked into. Will you come again, say at the same time to-morrow?"

When Daunt paid his next visit he was greeted very warmly.

"You have done us a great service in bringing this matter to our notice, Sir Richard. There has been some foul play, I fear."

"As to Fleming and Co.?"

"Yes. I told you I did not know the name, and I might well say that. I find we never had any dealings with them at all."

"And those bills?"

"If they bore our indorsement they were forged."

"As I thought. I was right, you see, in suspecting roguery."

"Perfectly. The name—we have ascertained, by reference to Manchester, that there are no such people as Fleming and Co."

"A gross swindle, then, has been or is being perpetrated, to which Waldo's are a party."

"Not so fast, Sir Richard. Waldo's are a highly respectable house, with whom we have done business, for years, centuries almost, and it would be hasty to accuse them of complicity. On the contrary, they are more likely to have been victims, like ourselves. Indeed, the loss would have fallen entirely upon them. So we have thought it right to put them on their guard."

"You have told them of the forgeries?" said Daunt, rather aghast. He had his reasons for not wishing Meggitt prematurely exposed.

"Yes. A confidential clerk has been round to Mincing Lane, when he saw their new partner, Mr. Meggitt, who was, of course, extremely obliged to us."

"And that's the end of the matter," observed Daunt, ruefully, beginning to despair.

"Well, not quite. Oddly enough, yesterday, after you were here, a client came to consult us about some dock warrants which he knew to be genuine, but he had ascertained that others, duplicates, and therefore fictitious, were in existence, held by—whom do you think?"

"Waldo's?"

"Exactly. Now, taken singly, these might be accidents, but together they point to something radically wrong in their way of doing business. Either insufficient care, or a lamentable want of judgment, is displayed, or there is something much worse behind."

"So I have always thought, and it must come out before long."

"Not a doubt of it; meanwhile Waldo's must be injuriously affected. It is impossible to keep such matters as these perfectly secret, and I fear the credit of the bank will suffer unless they greatly alter their system. But all this may make them more careful."

The visit of the confidential clerk from Rothschilds had been a great blow to Meggitt, perfectly unexpected, and for the moment prostrating.

But he recovered himself at once, and thanked his visitor warmly.

"It was all right," he said, "but a very narrow escape. The bills were paid at maturity."

"Do you know these Flemings well? Who are they? Is there any such firm?"

"We have had very few dealings with them, any way. But they kept an account here till quite lately."

"And you discounted their paper?"

"Yes, of course, especially when it was accepted by Rothschilds."

"Who never saw it," said the confidential clerk.

"We shall have nothing more to say to them you may depend upon it, and are very grateful for the caution."

Meggitt was not long in pouncing upon the person who had betrayed him.

"It must have been Driffield," he said to himself, and he sent at once for the young man.

"You have been gossiping about that little affair of Fleming and Co.'s bills, the bills that were not dated, I mean. To whom did you mention the circumstances?"

"Only to two persons—they asked me, and it seemed so trivial a matter."

"But it was breaking the rule and disobeying my strict injunctions. Who were these two persons?"

Driffield hung his head.

"I insist upon your telling me."

"One was young Mr. Surtees, the other a Sir Richard Daunt."

It was as Meggitt feared. The enemy was pressing him hard, and was already within his inner intrenchments.

"That will do, Mr. Driffield. I shall not have to speak to you again. The bank will not require your services any longer. You shall receive a month's salary in lieu of notice; good-day."

Meggitt was a fool; he felt it himself, but he could not resist his first impulse to punish his *employé's* treachery.

"Let him go over to the enemy; at least he will not spy upon me here. I dare say Leon would not approve, but Leon should not leave me in the lurch. I wonder whether I shall ever succeed in getting him away?"

He had had several communications with the prisoner since Fanchette had brought the first message, but in none had there been a word about the intended escape.

Letters had arrived, asking for money—that was all; money to be paid over to the bearer, who was "a friend," and which would be used in helping Leon to bear the privations of prison life.

Leon had suborned one of the warders of Dorchester prison, and was utilizing him for his own ends.

This faithless officer, whose name was Goody, had become his prisoner's most attached and devoted slave. Their positions were entirely reversed. It was Leon who ordered, Goody who obeyed.

"Here's news at last," said Mr. Goody, one morning, as he entered Leon's cell with the prisoner's breakfast.

Besides the regular ration of cocoa and brown bread, there were a couple of new-laid eggs, and a pat of prime Dorsetshire butter straight from Mrs. Goody's hands.

"Taint good news neither—the route is come for Chatham."

"How shall I travel?" asked Leon.

"By the South Western," replied Mr. Goody; "I know the route well; it is not the first time I have been, and it won't be the last."

"Are you going with me, then?"

"Certain sure I am. I am the first for escort, and the governor is bound to take me."

"Captain Scrooby will come himself, then?" asked Leon, looking very disappointed.

"He always accompanies convicts, particularly when they are prisoners of distinction like yourself."

Leon smiled at Goody's compliment, but did not reply. He was revolving a deep scheme in his brain.

"The South Western, you say—we shall pass through London, then?"

"The train goes to Waterloo, but we get out at Vauxhall and cross to Victoria in a cab."

"Vauxhall is a quiet little station, I think? Few people about, and not much traffic?"

"There is a bustle when the train comes in, that's all I know; we don't have much time there, so I can not tell much about it."

"I must write a letter to-day," said Leon, abruptly; "my friends must know that I am leaving this."

"Right you are, sir; I will bring you the paper when I come with dinner."

By noon Leon had matured his plans. Hastily dispatching his dinner—there were a couple of cold sausages and the leg of a fowl introduced into the prison fare—he sat down to write.

"I had better say what I have to say in French; Goody would be sure to read my letter, and he might think that I was letting him into a hole."

"DEAR FRIEND," he began—"The time has come. I am to be removed to Chatham next Friday, and you will have a chance of helping me at last. I am writing this in French, because my messenger will probably try to read it, and, as what I hope may be effected will compromise him, it is better that he should not understand. For the same reason I shall mention no more names, but shall, I think, be sufficiently explicit without. Our train leaves here at ten minutes past eight, you will observe I write the figures, numerals can be read in any language. We travel by the South Western. The Railway Guide will tell you when the train is due in town; we do not come on to the terminus, but stop at the station just outside; look again at your guide. There I shall be transferred to a cab, and taken across to the other station; I have told you my destination, so you will guess the line. Now the chance will be just before I get into the cab; be on the lookout with one or two men whom you can trust; act promptly as opportunity offers, and all will be well. If you can not arrange alone consult mademoiselle."

This letter was written and ready folded when Goody came in to take away the dinner-tins.

"This must go to the same place as the others, and when it reaches there you will touch the same amount."

"Seems pretty long," said Mr. Goody, opening it unceremoniously; "and in a foreign lingo, too—least ways, I can't understand it. You aren't up to no larks, I trust; not going to give us the slip on the road, or arranging any plant of that kind."

"I sha'n't be able to write again for six months, and it was necessary to give full instructions to a French friend of mine about some business matters."

"Oh! if that's all it don't matter. But you know I am playing a risky game."

While this conversation was in progress, the governor, Captain Serooby, was giving an audience to a superintendent of the county police.

"We had a letter, sir, this morning," the latter said, "from Scotland Yard, in which we were requested to warn you about a prisoner in your custody—that French fellow who was tried last sessions and who is going to be moved to Chatham. They have heard that he will try to make his escape somewhere on the journey."

"Why don't they mind their own business? I am quite able to manage my affairs."

Although so self-confident Captain Serooby took every precaution.

They traveled up second-class, having a compartment to themselves. Both doors were locked, the governor mounted guard at

one, Mr. Goody at the other. Leon sat between them, cool and comfortable, in a light suit of "dittoes" which he had worn on the journey from Paris, and looking, but for the manacled hands, like an ordinary passenger. No incident of any importance occurred on the journey up. Captain Scrooby never relaxed his vigilance. He sat bolt upright at his window with his eye constantly fixed on his prisoner. This window on the platform side was hermetically closed, so that none of the occupants of the carriage could have any knowledge of what took place at the few stations at which they had stopped on the road.

Captain Scrooby was quite unconscious, therefore, that the train had been invaded at Basingstoke by a small mob of roughs. The first intimation he had of the fact was at Vauxhall, where they alighted with him and his party. Had he realized who they were, or their intentions, he would certainly have gone on to Waterloo.

But to understand the movements of this little band it is necessary to follow the letter dispatched clandestinely by Leon to Meggitt.

Meggitt had understood on receiving it that whatever he did he must do at once.

But the more he thought it over the more he realized his own helplessness. He felt that he must talk it over with mamzelle, and with this object he went to Seven Dials the same night.

"It won't be so easy," said that stolid-looking matron, "but it is a rare chance, and it must be tried. I will call Joe Magsman," an evil-looking individual who said—

"We can get him fast enough; the thing will be to keep him or help him away."

"But how will you get him?" asked Meggitt. "It will be broad daylight and he is sure to be well guarded."

"By two at the most, and that Vauxhall is a very confined place, and there are some dark passages to go along. While there, my pals shall hustle the screws, and, while they are in trouble, you slip off with my lord."

"Oh, I can't interfere in the affair—it's far too dangerous for me."

"Not worse for you than for us, master."

"My risk is greater than yours—I have far more to lose, and it would be worse for every one if I got into trouble."

"What are you talking about trouble for? The thing is as easy as a glove, if you have only got the heart to do it quick and

clean. While we are hustling the screws you slip your arm into our friend's and lead him off to the cab rank."

"Some one shall do it, but it sha'n't be me."

"You had better be on the box of the 'shoful,' and, when he comes to you, drive off."

"That would not suit me neither, I am not much of a whip. But I will see to the cab, and the person to take Leon to it. After that where had he better go?"

"This would be the safest place," said Joe, "there in a snug corner down-stairs, where he could lie close till after the pursuit, and then slip over to France."

"Tain't safe no longer," interrupted mamzelle, "ever since the police were here. And they are still hanging about the place"

"If he could change his clothes in the cab—and we could have a suit there on purpose—he could be driven as fast as possible to the New Cut and left to shift for himself."

"Well, master, that's your affair; we will help him to make his 'guy,' if only you'll pay."

"How many of you will there be?"

"Half a dozen to do the trick. More might attract suspicion, and they would only be tumbling over one another."

"But you won't all hang about Vauxhall Station?"

"I am not such a nine-mpoop. We will go down the line a bit, and get into the train at Basingstoke or Reading."

"I see; and you will all get cut together at Vauxhall, and rescue Leon on the way down."

"That's it, master, the way down from the platform; it's very dark at the bottom, at the end of which crosses the passage to the cab-rank. That's where you must be."

"My agent, not me, I tell you."

"As you please, but if the plant fails you will have only yourself to thank. As I tell you, when we have set him loose our job's done."

"Not a word of all this to a soul, mind," said Meggitt, impressively. "If there is any suspicion of what we are at, the police will soon hear about it."

"They are out of it this time, never fear."

Meggitt, thus assured, then took his departure, leaving Joe to settle a few further details with mamzelle and got a letter conveyed to Leon.

She had been right in saying that the police were hanging about the place. Two of Mr. Faske's young men were constantly on the

watch, and they saw Meggitt leave the house as they had seen him enter it. They also saw Joe Magsman go out that afternoon, and one of them followed him as far as Vauxhall, all of which was duly reported to Faske.

"They are up to no good," said the detective. "But that old fool of a governor would not be warned. I must keep my eye on him till the last; I may still stop their little game."

On the Friday morning, however, very early, they managed to give him the slip, and traveling down to Basingstoke entered the train there, as we know.

Faske was on the platform at Vauxhall at twelve noon. He knew the route taken by prisoners going through London to Chatham, and he felt sure that Captain Scrooby would alight there.

Then the train ran in and disgorged its passengers. All the tickets for Waterloo were collected, and there was much stir and some confusion at the station. Faske saw the prison-governor pause on the platform to let the crowd pass, and he saw also the small party of roughs also lingering close behind. Guessing almost intuitively what was to happen next, he descended the stairs and looked back.

Presently escorts and prisoners came down. They were walking three abreast, Leon, in the center, the two officials on either side. The party had the stairs to themselves, till suddenly the roughs appeared at the top and followed down with a rush, hustling and jostling all before them. Three of them settled upon Captain Scrooby, three upon Mr. Goody, and forcibly detained them, while Leon heard a hoarse whisper in his ear:

"Run, man; run for your life."

He needed no second intimation. Feeling that this was the supreme moment, and that now it depended only on himself to escape, he bounded forward, took the last three steps in one, and, reaching the bottom of the stairs, paused for just one second to look right and left.

It was here, according to Meggitt's letter, that further assistance was to reach him.

It came. Some one approached, and, taking him by the arm, cried:

"Look slippy! the cab's here."

Then they hurried on together arm-in-arm into the yard beyond the station, jumped almost simultaneously into a hansom that stood waiting; the doors were shut, the glass let down, and the horse instantly started off at score.

"Very neatly done," said Leon, with a sigh of relief.

"Very!" replied his companion, dryly, in a voice that made him start and look round.

It was Faske, the detective.

"Put away!" cried Leon, with a frightful imprecation, as he sunk back upon the cushion of the cab. "Where are you taking me?"

"Millbank will be nearest and safest, I think, for such a slippery customer as you," replied the detective with condescending frankness.

When half an hour later Captain Scrooby came to Scotland Yard looking very disconcerted and crest-fallen, to report the loss of his prisoner, he was agreeably surprised to learn that Leon had never actually been at large.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MONEY IS TIGHT.

SIR RICHARD DAUNT had been told that Waldo's credit would assuredly be affected unless they mended their ways.

True enough, the very day after young Driffeld's dismissal, Mr. Meggitt had found some difficulty in discounting the paper of the bank. It had been declined politely but unmistakably at one or two houses, and, when negotiated at last, it was at higher than the market-rates.

A hint got about, and the immediate result was the withdrawal of one or two large accounts. Among others Mr. Bonastre, who was now highly prosperous, terminated his business dealings with Waldo's, and in a way that made Meggitt fear he suspected something was wrong.

Mr. Bonastre had done this on the very day of Leon's removal from Dorchester to Chatham.

"As if I had not enough to agitate me to-day," said Meggitt to himself, after the actor had gone. "I wonder when I shall hear the result of our stratagem! it's long past one," he added, taking out his watch, "I ought to have had news before this."

It had been arranged that a carefully worded telegram to the effect that the "merchandise had been landed" should be dispatched by Joe Magsman, directly Leon had got away.

But no telegram had arrived, and Meggitt could not conceal his anxiety.

It was nearly two o'clock when Hoskins brought in a note in a crumpled and thumb-stained envelope, which he handed to Meggitt with rather a disdainful air.

Meggitt hastily tore open the envelope, and read as follows:

"Must speak to you directly; it was no go; I am waiting at the corner in a four-wheeled cab."

He took up his hat and hurried into the street, where he found Joe Magsman at the place indicated.

"Well," he asked, "what happened? Did he get away all right?"

"No, the whole blooming trick was spoiled by the fellow you sent to do your work. We mobbed the screws properly, and the boss made his guy to the bottom of the steps; but when I got down, thinking he had made a clean bolt with our man, I found the fellow standing there alone. The blooming ass had let some copper carry off the boss from under his nose."

"And where is Leon then?"

"Back in the stone jug, I expect, for the blokes from Dorchester were seen coming out of the bank—"

"What bank?" interrupted Meggitt.

"Not one of your kind; Millbank, I mean. He is there, I'll bet, laid by the heels, until they can move him to Chatham."

"It's most vexatious," said Meggitt to himself, as he walked slowly back to the bank, "and it puts me in a frightful hole. I must lay my hands on a large sum within the next week or two, or blue ruin will stare me in the face. I must look up any assets that are easily realized, and I must call in all the loans and advances on which I can lay my hands."

Meggitt devoted himself to this task for the rest of the day.

"That makes," he said at length, quite a couple of hours later, "something like £30,000, if we can get it all in, that is to say, and Mr. Waldo does not object."

The old gentleman was at home at Kew, in very feeble health, nursed by his daughter Helena, the rest of the family being out of town. Meggitt visited him that evening, and producing the list scrutinized carefully and ran over the names aloud:

"Haddock and Hamilton, Limming and Co., Jabez Richardson, Smith and Flintorf, Lord Wingspur." Here Mr. Waldo stopped him abruptly and shook his head, "That won't do, Meggitt."

"But that's the one of all others I wish to speak to you about; his lordship owes the bank a great deal of money,"

"It is secured, some of it at any rate,"

"Yes, upon some barren land, all rocks and morasses, in the wilds of Scotland."

"But they are my wife's relatives—she would never let me press them."

"Pardon me, Mr. Waldo, but this is a matter which hardly concerns Mrs. Waldo;" and Meggitt spoke with great firmness. "His lordship must be pressed;" and in the end Meggitt carried his point.

The upshot of it all was that Lord Wingspur wrote for once in his life to his wife, who was staying with her daughters in the far North.

"Waldo's are dunning me infernally," he said, "and I shall be cornered if they persist. Can't you talk over the old woman? get her and the daughters asked to the duke's."

At this moment Mrs. Waldo and her daughters were in Scotland. They had taken a place, Dal-na-muick, for the shooting season and were enjoying themselves their own way. But that joy was greatly increased by the invitation sent at Lord Wingspur's instance, for hitherto this duke, the chief local magnate in their neighborhood, had not condescended to acknowledge their existence.

Lady Wingspur, who was of the party at the castle, rather opened Mrs. Waldo's eyes by talking of the mortgages, still Mrs. Waldo was grateful for the honor done her, and showed it by promising to put her foot upon Meggitt. Directly she returned to Dal-na-Muick she indited him a letter with her own hand.

"MY DEAR MR. MEGGITT," it said—"Wen't you be persuaded to take a little recreation and rest? You work too hard, if all I hear is true. I wish you could be persuaded to come down and pay us a short visit. Will you? and bring your friend the marquis with you if he is anywhere within reach.

"There are one or two small matters, too, that I should like to talk to you about. What is this I hear of the Wingspur mortgages? I am sure my husband would not hear of their being foreclosed, as I think it is called. But all that will keep till I see you.

"Mind you come, and fix your own time.

"Sincerely yours,

"AURELIA WALDO."

"Go!" said Meggitt, bitterly, on receiving this letter. "How much I should like it. But do I dare? Is it safe? There is no knowing what might happen here when my back is turned. And yet— By Heaven, I'll risk it. I have longed for this ever since I saw Fanchette. I must and will meet this proud unnatural woman. I will tell her that I know all, that I despise and hate her, and that she must seek no favors, expect no mercy, from me."

On reaching Dal-na-Muick, and waiting for more than an hour, Mrs. Waldo sent for him to her private sitting-room.

"Sit down, my dear Mr. Meggitt," she began; "I have much to say to you."

Meggitt, arming himself with all his fortitude, obeyed quietly.

"In the first place, about this money owed by Lord Wingspur?"

"It has been owing a long time. We have repeatedly asked Lord Wingspur for a settlement, and he has invariably put us off. I had no alternative, therefore—"

"You had no alternative! Am I to understand that you, and you alone, represent the bank?"

"When no one else is there, certainly. Besides, if every one went on as Lord Wingspur does, we should soon have to shut up shop. Times are hard."

"That's a pity, for I was going to tell you I should require a considerable sum next week."

"What will be the amount?"

"About"—and Mrs. Waldo consulted a memorandum-book at her side—"about four thousand pounds."

"It is perfectly impossible."

"How dare you make such difficulties?" cried Mrs. Waldo, in an angry voice, her face flushed with rage. "Mr. Dandy never did. I could always get as much money as I wanted in his time."

"There were no doubt reasons why Mr. Dandy should refuse you nothing."

Mrs. Waldo looked at Meggitt in amazement, not unmixed with fear.

"What is the meaning of that remark?" she cried, quickly, catching at her breath.

"I mean that I am well aware of Mr. Dandy's obligations, and how he incurred them; but I do not consider them—although I admit they might have been—binding on me."

Mrs. Waldo had lost her self possession, and was now staring at Meggitt with wild, wide-open eyes.

"Is it possible that you can know?" she gasped out.

"I know everything. Only the other day accident made me acquainted with the relation in which I stand to you—"

"Oh, Percy, spare me! I have so yearned to take you to my heart—all these years."

"Pshaw! you can not impose upon me with pretended affection—now, at the eleventh hour. It comes too late."

"Percy, I swear to you I would have acknowledged you had I

dared. You have been ever the dearest to me of them all. I have loved you sincerely, deeply—”

“And how have you shown it? To whom do I owe my present position? To my own strenuous endeavors.”

“You mistake, Percy. It is not so. From the first I have watched over you, thought for you, worked for you. It was at my instance and on my persuasion that you were appointed cashier. You would never have been a partner had we not wished to secure your future, and atone in some measure for the past.”

“It came too late,” said Meggitt, gloomily. “I was already compromised.”

“I do not understand?”

“You shall, fast enough. Why should I conceal anything from you? You would not dare to expose me—you would be included in the guilt and shame.”

“What have you done, Percy? Tell me, I beseech you, at once.”

“Some time back I fell into the power of a villain; a clever unscrupulous rascal; you know him—”

“The marquis? Poor Augusta!”

“Who took advantage of certain silly mistakes of mine to get me into his power. Since then I have been his slave, working his wicked will. He forced me to play fast and loose with the bank.”

“Is the bank in jeopardy? Now, too, when I am myself so heavily involved?”

“The very greatest jeopardy. Nothing but the reappearance of Leon—the marquis, as you know him—can save us.”

“Where is he?”

“In jail. He is a common felon, a low, base criminal, who has just been recommitted to complete an old sentence. He was a ticket-of-leave man when he came to your house.”

“Did you know that?”

“No—mother, I did not; although I could not have prevented it. I was too completely in his power.”

“How could he help you if he was free?”

“He alone can lay his hands upon the sums—vast sums out of which he has swindled the bank. They are hidden or invested somewhere in his or a false name, and he refuses to give us the slightest clue till he gets out.”

“Won’t you help him, then?”

“I have tried once, but failed. We have enemies plotting against us, and they have ruined our plans.”

“Who, pray, are these enemies?”

"Sir Richard Daunt and the Surtees, of course. They are moving heaven and earth to rehabilitate the old man."

"Was he unjustly sentenced?"

"Yes. It was necessary to get him out of the way. We—Leon, that is to say—could not have carried out the schemes if Mr. Surtees had remained cashier."

"It is all too horrible. But is there no help; no hope?"

"No help, but what I say; that and a bold front. You shall have the £4000 you require. Somehow; I can not tell how at present. But it must not come out that you are unable to pay your debts."

He spoke roughly, lest she might suppose this concession was due to any tenderness for her.

"Have you anything else to say?" he added.

"Oh, Percy, my poor boy! I have erred grievously, but my punishment has been severe. You will forgive me, pity me—"

"This sentiment comes a little too late, mother. If I can not properly appreciate it the fault is hardly mine. But I must be going."

"Going?"

"Back to London; the sooner the better. Any day the storm may break, and I must not be absent from my post."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN JAIL AND OUT.

FASKE and Daunt had a long consultation over the Surtees affair the day after Leon's attempted escape at Vauxhall.

"Come, Faske, you must admit that there has been a grievous mistake," said Sir Richard.

The detective was looking at his shoe-string as usual.

"I should like to admit it, although it's much against myself; but still, there are one or two points that I can not get over. These bonds, how came they in Surtees's possession?"

"Meggitt may have put them there just when Mr. Surtees decided to realize part of the stock. You must remember that what we found—and what were sold—did not make up the whole amount lost; there is still some, a good lot, of the money missing. Suppose they were to turn up? Would they not give us a clew to the real perpetrators of the theft?"

"If they were to turn up, certainly. But you see they have not turned up, and we might wait till doomsday before they did. Meggitt is safe enough, if you are waiting for that."

"I do not believe he will last long, all the same; things are going on pretty bad at the bank."

"The bank may smash," said Faske, reflectively; "indeed, I think it must when such a thorough-paced scoundrel as Joseph Devas, alias, French Joe, alias Leon Lantimêche, is mixed up with its affairs. You might run him in, and you might run in Meggitt, and so get rid of two rogues, but that won't set Mr. Surtees free."

"Not necessarily; but it might lead to revelations, perhaps confessions, from the guilty parties."

"Yes, you have got that chance," said Faske, with some indifference. The detective did not care much about confessions, which he considered a very bungling and inartistic manner of proving crime.

"Perhaps," said Sir Richard, "Surtees himself might help us now. We know several new facts, and when he hears them he may suggest fresh clues. I am going down to Chatham in a day or two, as I have a special order to see him."

Meanwhile Meggitt waited anxiously for news of Leon. In the interval by great efforts he still staved off the evil hour; managing to keep his head above water, but only from day to day and by the most desperate means.

When hope was almost dead within him he once more heard of his accomplice.

He was alone in his snug little dining-room in Victoria Square, when his servant brought him in a note.

Meggitt opened the letter, but to his surprise found nothing inside but a small piece of printed paper—evidently a leaf torn out from some small volume. The name of the book was printed on the top, "The People of Persia." Just below was a device, stamped on the paper: a crown, and below it the initials C. C. P.

Meggitt turned it over several times, puzzled at first to guess what it could mean.

"C. C. P.!" he repeated once or twice, "and a crown? To be sure, Chatham Convict Prison. It is a message from Leon. At last!"

But what did his friend and confederate, so far off and in distance, desire to say? There was nothing at first to show; the page might be read through and through, backward and forward, up and down, but no message was conveyed.

"I can't make head or tail of this. I wonder whether the messenger can help."

And with that he rang the bell, and the man, who was waiting for an answer, was called in. A heavy-jowled, hang-dog-looking ruffian, in a shiny new suit, and black wide-awake hat.

"What does this contain?" asked Meggitt.

"Can't you find out? Don't you tumble to it? I'll show you. See here."

The man took the leaf into his hand and held it closely up to his eye, near the light.

"'Trust—him. Do—what—he—says—LEON.' There you have it, plain as print can say it."

"Still I don't see; you may be inventing it. Show it me—there," said Meggitt, suspiciously, pointing to the printed page.

"Well; look here. This is common print, but if you examine it closely you'll see that the letters here and there have got a scratch across them. D'ye twig? a fine scratch made with a pin. There, see for yourself. Read it first."

Meggitt took the bit of paper, and read—

"*Their account was, that the Persians had killed two thousand men, and taken five thousand prisoners, with twelve guns. The real truth was soon learned, which reduced their advantage to three hundred killed, two guns taken, and five hundred prisoners. On being questioned why they exaggerated so much when they knew the real facts must transpire, they said: If we did not know that your stubborn veracity would come in the way, we should have said ten times as much.*"

"I understand. But why send this letter when you could tell me everything by word of mouth?"

"He thought, over yonder"—again the thumb over the shoulder—"you might not believe me if I came without something to show; so that's what he contrived."

"How did he arrange all this? Go on. Tell me all about it."

"Well, guv'nor, it was this way. Just a week ago French Joe—Leon you call him—came back to the 'boat'—to Chatham Prison, I mean. He'd been away better nor a year or more, on ticket; but he must have got into trouble again, and had his ticket revoked. He was put, the day after he comes, Joe was, into our party, number 97; officer's name Bingle, a real darkey-driver, had to do with niggers somewhere, and he kept us at it down in the fitting out basin on them mud-trucks till we hadn't an ounce of flesh left amongst the lot of us.

"Well, Joe coming in fresh was a bit slack, and out of gear, and he says to me—Bingle's eye being elsewhere, and his ears nowheres at all—"I'd give a thousand counters to make my lucky." "I'd change places with you for less than that, if we could swindle the screws. Next Friday I put in my time—every hour." "'Tain't possible," says he: "they know us both a blooming sight too well. But, if you're to be out in two or three days, do me a good turn, and I'll make it worth your while." "As how?" says I. "Go and see a friend of mine with a message from me, and he'll give you a couple of monkeys. I don't mean to stop on here, and if I can let my pal know he'll arrange a plant to get me away." "Will your pal trust me?" says I. "Yes, if I send a bit of a "stiff." We had no pen or ink, you understand, nor writing-paper gilt edged, and smooth and shiny. But I had my library books—and Joe had none—and I tore out that there leaf you hold in your hand, and passed it to Joe. He made the scratches, as they show, and told me what he'd done."

"Yes, yes. You've said all that before. But what is his plan?"

"I'll tell you, gov'nor; Joe, you must understand, works down in the fitting-out basin, with 97 party. But they're not always there. Now and again Bingle's lot's set to stack bricks. What you've got to do is to plant a suit of clothes—a pair of navvy's corduroys very wide so as to pull over his heavy boots, a loose jacket ditto, and a soft felt hat near the brick stack, and leave the rest to Joe."

"How on earth am I to plant them?"

"All you've got to do is to go to Chatham, to the part of it they call New Brompton. At 197 Wellington Street you'll find Mr. Wright, leastways the man that's right, and on the square. Give him the office, and he'll plant the clothes."

St. Mary's Island, Chatham, was a scene of extraordinary activity. The place was like a bee-hive under the blazing autumn sun. The eye as it wandered about fell everywhere on men at work; here clustered in groups around the mud-trucks, there singly or in twos and threes plate laying. Elsewhere a long procession on a "barrow run," "pugging up," the brick-machine, or wheeling bricks to the drying-ground or kiln.

They were all convicts. Convicts were sawing at the benches in the carpenters' shops, hammering at anvils, cutting and dressing stone; convicts drove the stationary steam-engine at the top of the incline and the barrow-lifts, the horses that brought up the mud-wagons to the "tips," the steam-saws; even the locomotives which

were intrusted to a few in blue dress—the badge of expiring servitude.

But busy as was the scene, crowded as it was with more than a thousand felon workmen all forced to strenuous unremitting toil, a strange silence prevailed.

Such noises as rarely broke the stillness from time to time were inseparable from the business in hand: the puff of the steam-engines; the rattle of the empty trucks as they rolled headlong down the incline; an occasional crack of a whip. But the human voice was seldom raised aloud, except when the warders in charge of parties saw superiors approach them, and reported by shout and gesture; raising their right hand with such cries as “97 party, sir; twenty-four men; all correct, sir.”

Ninety-seven party had been working in the clay, but when their trucks were full they were sent to another job. They were marched regularly and with military precision to another part of the works. Here in old times there had been fortifications to defend the muddy creek, now long since filled up and built upon; but a part of the old wall still stood, and on the other side of it was a bathing-pond, fed by a pipe from the river, and used frequently at this season by the officers of the garrison.

The work now before them—the “bye-job”—was that which Dellew had spoken of in his visit to Meggitt. A long line of trucks had brought a supply of brand-new bricks from the brick-fields; these Mr Bingle’s men had to sort and put away.

For this purpose they opened out, and, making one long string from the trucks to the stack, passed the bricks quickly along from hand to hand.

Leon was at the far end of the line, just where it crossed an old pathway, which led from the dock-yard to the village of Gillingham.

While he was there a free workman, who had long been waiting his opportunity, came by, walking fast, and seemingly on his way home.

He passed through the line of convicts, within ear-shot of Leon.

“To-morrow,” he whispered. “By the pond. Clothes.”

And that was all Leon needed to know that his embassy to Meggitt had prospered.

He passed a restless night. The failure of the first attempt made him all the more anxious about this. There were people working against him, enemies as bold as himself, far cleverer and more cunning than his only ally Meggitt.

"If I am caught, it'll mean a 'bashing' and the 'slangs.'" He would be flogged and obliged to wear chains. "I should never get another chance; they'd send me to the other end of the island, where I couldn't get away. It's dangerous, but I am going to risk it all the same. If the clothes are there I'll go. It all depends upon whether Bingle misses me soon. But let me get five minutes' start and I'll give 'em leg-bail. The barkers may shoot, but they'll hardly hit me, unless they aim at some one else—the fools."

Next morning soon after daylight they went to the works; and were tallied out, party by party, each warder answering for his number, and bound to bring back as many, dead or alive.

Mr. Bingle, with number 97, went down at once into the basin. The same interminable job began then: truck-filling from morning to night, with intervals, now and again, of stacking bricks.

They had only one spell of the latter that forenoon. It came early in the day, too soon for Leon to avail himself of it. There was danger in going off while the day was still young; all officers and guards were more on the alert in the morning, and there was longer and more daylight for pursuit. After dinner was a better time. Warders had been known to nod when digestion was in progress after a heavy midday meal; while the chances in favor of the fugitive increased the nearer darkness approached.

As Leon eat his prison allowance in his cell at midday, he earnestly hoped that Bingle might dine well.

"I hope his missus won't stint him, and that he'll have a pint or two of four ale. I've seen him drowsy before now of an afternoon. Why shouldn't he be the same to-day? It will all depend on whether I can elude his eye for long enough the first go-off."

The afternoon arrangements were precisely those of the early morning; the labor-parties were formed and marched out as before. As before, Leon found himself in the basin shoveling clay into the trucks. But after an hour of truck-filling, the usual move to the brick-stack followed as a matter of course, and at last the time was ripe for his second attempt at escape.

Leon, with feverish anxiety, had watched his opportunity, and at last that opportunity had arrived.

"I'm off," he said to his mate, who stood nearest him; "going to make my lucky! Don't peach."

"Not I. They'll find you out fast enough for themselves. Wot are you bidding for a bashing for? Stop where you are."

"Keep your eye on the nigger-driver—tell me if you see him nod," was all Leon answered.

"I expect he's sound enough now, for a minute or more. If you're going, *go!*"

Next instant Leon had disappeared behind the brick-stack, and stooping low he crawled rapidly along, wriggling forward like a snake upon his belly to the point where the free man had planted the clothes.

All this time his ear was cocked keen as that of a hare on its form for the first sound of the warder's whistle—the first signal to proclaim the escape.

But Bingle was dozing on still.

Quickly Leon reached the precious hiding-place, extracted the clothes, drew the fustian overalls over his boots and knee breeches, got into the coat, put on the wide-awake, and stood up erect, to all outward appearance a free man.

Still Bingle made no sign. With a bound Leon cleared the low wall that bordered the bathing-pond, and made for the door on the far side.

There was no one bathing there, not a soul in sight. Still no whistle had been sounded, no alarm given. In another minute Leon would be nearly safe and beyond pursuit.

But no, not quite yet. With a start and an inward qualm which for a second or two paralyzed all motion he heard the loud shrill notes of a whistle, then another in answer, two, three, a dozen, till the whole place seemed alive with piping bullfrogs or screeching grasshoppers.

Mr. Bingle had awoke suddenly; his men were standing idle, the brick-trucks were empty, the job was done.

"Fall in!" he cried; and, preparatory to marching back to the basin, he began to count the convicts in his charge.

"One, two, three—twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty—" Where was twenty-four? "Twenty-four! twenty-four!"

"Gone!"

Bingle realized at once what had happened. It was an escape, and he must signal it, as well as his own disgrace.

Meanwhile, where was Leon?

On the footpath under the shelter of a high brick wall, which inclosed a great part of the works. This wall concealed him from the sentries above, and from the warders on the island, who were just about to be launched in pursuit.

But he would soon pass beyond this friendly protection. The footpath led to the open fields and river reaches, interposing between the island and the village.

How was he to get off it and out of sight?

What were these buildings close on his right? A low range of two-storied houses with a wide veranda running in front of the second floor. Barracks! Yes, they were barracks; he had heard some of his comrades on the works say so, as they pointed to their open unprotected fronts, and laughingly wished for a chance to "crack" them.

"Where are the officers' quarters, I wonder? At this end? It would be odd," said Leon, hastily, as a thought flashed across his mind, "gallows odd, if I was helped in my escape by that play I saw at the Royal Roscius, more than a year ago."

Turning off the path he made up the slope straight for the barracks. They were casemates, and this was the glacis.

A ditch; then a high palisading. Next a gate not locked. He passed through it and out on to the grass-plot before the buildings.

"Here goes," he cried; "for one of those cribs upstairs. These on the ground-floor appear to be fast locked."

Next instant he was inside a room, one of the officers' quarters, furiously rummaging the cupboards and drawers. From the first he took down a complete suit of clothes; from the latter a couple of sovereigns and a handful of silver.

"That's all I want except boots, and here are plenty, if they will only fit."

And then Leon, with extraordinary rapidity, divested himself of his heavy convict's boots, and the clothes provided for his escape, which he hid in a great iron coal-box in one corner; as quickly he put on those which he had just appropriated, including a pair of neat shoes, and a billycock hat.

"If I'm not nabbed now, in the next three minutes, by the Lord, I shall be a free man."

He had still to leave the barracks, but the road lay straight and open before him. There was no one to interfere with him; on the contrary, the soldiers he now met in twos and threes drew up and saluted him as he passed. They took him in his neat clothes, as he walked along erect and consequential, for an officer of the garrison, who had called to see a friend.

So he passed through the barrack-gates, and out on to the main road. Luck still favored him. Almost directly he emerged, an empty fly passed which he hailed.

"Chatham Station!" he cried as he jumped in. "Look alive."

"There's just time, sir, if you're going up by the boat express; she's not due till four-fifty, and it's barely the half hour."

"Right you are. Don't miss it, and I'll give you double fare."

They arrived at the station just as the express from Dover rattled into the station. Leon had time to take a first-class ticket, reach the up-platform, and secure a seat before the train started again.

"Narrow squeak that!" said the fugitive to the company, generally, as he sunk into his seat. At last he was safely out of Chatham; there was but one stoppage between it and London; and even if they knew he was in the train, which seemed impossible, they would have a difficulty in recognizing him in his new disguise.

So Leon reasoned, and fairly enough. The chances were a thousand to one in his favor; yet at the time when he thought himself most safe he was in the greatest danger.

He had been seen and recognized as he passed up the train seeking a seat. Sir Richard Daunt and Bob Surtees were also passengers by it. They had been down to pay their visit to Mr. Surtees, and were returning early to town.

"Bob! did you see?" whispered Sir Richard, in great excitement.

"Of course. But I could not believe my eyes. Surely, it can't be that scoundrel, and with all that red hair?"

"He is red now; that's how I know him."

"He must have escaped. What a daring, artful rogue! Anyhow, he's fallen into the lion's mouth; we'll give him into custody again at Victoria."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Daunt, thoughtfully.

"What shall we do then?"

"Stick to him like wax wherever he goes. But we must be careful; on no account must he see us."

At Victoria they saw Leon get out, and without looking to right or left hail a hansom and drive off.

"Quick, Bob, we must be after that cab in another. Jump in!" and Sir Richard hastily gave the necessary instructions to their driver.

"Keep that cab in sight, and you shall have half-a-sovereign besides your fare," cried Daunt, as he and Bob got into another.

"Right, gov'nor," and then the chase began.

"He is making for his old haunt in Seven Dials," said Daunt.

"He wants cash to pay his way out of the country."

"You think he means to leave the country?"

"Without doubt. It's his only chance. But no more talking; see, his cab has stopped."

Yes. The cab, which had led up Trafalgar Square, had stopped just opposite St. Martin's Church.

Leon alighted, paid his fare, and walked off up the street.

"Just as I thought," said Daunt, as they followed also on foot. "There he goes—straight for the Hôtel Gaillard."

"You know it communicates with that filthy place where I was shut up so long?" cried Bob, with a shudder.

"Perfectly, and we must watch both issues," replied Daunt. "You had better take the other side, at least for the present; you know your way. Look sharp, Bob; keep out of sight, mind, and I'll join you as soon as I can."

Daunt, left to himself, decided to send word as soon as possible to Faske.

"We'd better have the police with us. Some one must watch on this side, and I don't like to leave Bob all by himself. He might get into trouble. But how shall I send a message to Scotland Yard?"

He scribbled a few lines on a sheet torn out of his pocket-book, and looked round for a messenger.

Ere long he spied the constable of the beat approaching with measured steps.

"Quick!" he whispered. "I have traced an escaped convict, who is 'wanted' for another job, to this house. Mr. Faske—Inspector Faske—ought to know. Can you get this sent him without loss of time?"

"Ay, ay, sir. Cab!" said the constable, with commendable brevity.

Half an hour later Faske in person joined Daunt, who gave the detective a short outline of what had occurred.

"Will you take charge on this side, Faske? I should like to join Mr. Surtees on the other."

Daunt found Bob waiting patiently, and keeping a strict lookout.

Sir Richard looked at his watch.

"A quarter to seven. We shall not have long to wait. If he is going by one of the continental routes, as I fully expect, he will soon have to be moving."

Even as Daunt spoke the door of the den which they were watching was opened cautiously, and a man—Leon, no doubt, just his height, and with the tell-tale hang of the left leg—issued forth.

He was in a fresh disguise, that of a Dutchman; a sea-faring, broadly-built ship-captain, with a roll in his gait, and all in blue

cloth. But he carried a little not very nautical-looking hand-bag, and his movements were a little too brusque and active for the part he had assumed. He went straight as a die for St. Martin's Lane. There he called the first hansom cab, and they distinctly heard him say "Liverpool Street," as he was driven off.

"After him, Bob! Don't lose sight of him. I'll come on as soon as I've picked up Faske. He's going by Harwich to Antwerp or Rotterdam."

Bob hailed a hansom, and followed as directed.

It was nearly half past seven when the two cabs reached the terminus.

Leon leaped out, and made straight for the continental booking-office. Bob, just behind him, heard him say:—

"First to Brussels, *via* Harwich."

And then the young man's eagerness abruptly ended the pursuit. He pressed too far forward, Leon turned suddenly, and fell into his arms.

Both fugitive and pursuer seemed staggered, but the latter was the first to recover himself. Leon hoped that Mr. Surtees did not recognize him, and, putting a bold face on this mishap, tried to make off.

But Bob, terribly afraid of losing his prey, stopped him:

"Hold on, Mr. Marquis, or whatever you call yourself, I've something to say to you."

"I don't know you—who are you—what do you mean?" asked Leon, with some effrontery.

"If you don't know me I do you. Shall I call out and tell every one here in the station that you are a convict just escaped from Chatham, that the police are at your heels, and that there is a reward offered for your recapture?"

Already a small crowd had collected around the disputants, and Leon looked uneasily at Surtees. If he had thought of using force, a little consideration assured him that it would be futile. The odds were heavily against him.

He preferred to try stratagem.

"This is too public a place, we can not speak without being overheard; come into the waiting-room or the refreshment-room."

"The waiting room will do," said Bob. He was thinking of his friends, Daunt and the detective, who could not be far off. They would have started only a few minutes later, and must arrive at Liverpool Street within that interval.

"Mr. Surtees, don't be too hard on me. Was it not natural that I should try to get away? Your father would have done the same."

"You villain! It is by your plots and machinations that he is there at all. You know he is innocent."

"I do, perfectly; and I—but I alone—can prove it. I will do so, gladly, if you will let me go."

Bob did not answer immediately. It was a great temptation.

"But if I were to let you go, how could you prove my father's innocence? You would not be here."

"It can be proved by what I have here in my bag," and Leon held up the little black traveling-bag.

"What is it?" Bob was only seeking to gain time.

"I will leave it—it contains certain documents long missing—in your hands, as the train leaves the station. Is it a bargain?"

"And those papers will exonerate my father, eh? Are they the rest of the stolen bonds?"

Leon looked surprised, but he replied readily enough, "You've hit it. That's just what they are. Come, will you trade?" and he opened the bag, which seemed heavily laden, and was indeed stuffed full of securities, stock certificates, and so forth.

"I might have accepted your terms," said Bob, smartly, "only"—he had caught sight of Daunt with Faske, passing through the outer booking-office to the platform—"I mean to have them for nothing. Here, Richard!"

"Copped again!" cried Leon swearing loudly, as he looked round, wild, affrighted, like a wild beast at bay, vainly seeking a loop-hole of escape.

"It's no go, Devas!" said Faske, softly, as he produced a pair of handcuffs. "This is the second time I have had the pleasure of spoiling your little game. You had better come quietly. The station is full of people, and I have only to call for help in the name of the law."

"Look out for the bag," cried Bob, hastily. "Its contents are valuable."

"What are they?" asked Daunt.

"The missing bonds I believe, with other securities."

And they quickly examined the contents of the bag.

There they were; the balance of the Portuguese bonds abstracted from the strong-room, making up with the number found in Mr. Surtees's deed-box the whole quantity stolen.

"See, Faske, this is what you wanted to convince you," said Daunt, smiling, and in high glee.

"It remains to be shown how other people had access to the strong-room, and Mr. Surtees's locks."

"We'll do that, never fear. I see my way clearly now, quite."



CHAPTER XXXIV.

A RUN ON THE BANK.

It was all in the morning papers. A paragraph headed "Escape of a Convict from Chatham" told also of his recapture.

Meggitt saw it in "The Times" at breakfast.

He had reason to be very dejected as he went down that morning to the bank, and the news which greeted him on arrival did not serve to reassure him.

Directly he entered the parlor the cashier came in.

"I am glad to see you, sir; in fact, I was waiting for you anxiously. Something very unpleasant has occurred. Two of our bills for large amounts have been protested by Rothschilds."

"I will step round to New Court myself, and see what this means," said Meggitt, easily.

But Meggitt's assurance was only skin deep: he had but too good reason to know that this was only the first of many similar bills. The credit of the bank had been already impugned, and its real condition was becoming known to the great leaders of the financial world. The crowd would soon take up the cry, and it would probably be impossible to make head against the storm.

What should he do? was the first thought. To go off altogether? "No, it is premature," he said. "By waiting a day or two I may be able to lay my hands on a good round sum, sufficient, perhaps, to last me till I can make a new start at the other end of the world."

Cupidity got the better of caution, and Meggitt decided to go back to the bank.

He had been away fully half an hour, but in the interval a crowd had collected round its doors.

"What is it?" asked Meggitt, as he pushed his way excitedly through the throng.

"A run on the bank," said some one, as he passed out.

Meggitt took in the situation at a glance, and passed on into the parlor, where the cashier again joined him.

"How long will it last?" asked Meggitt.

"Certainly not beyond the day," answered the cashier.

Then Mr. Waldo arrived, and decided to draw upon reserves. Meggitt went, and on his return from the Bank of England Mr. Waldo asked, in so many words,

"What amount have you brought? It should be one hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

Meggitt flushed crimson, and stammered out:

"Not so much, sir. The reserve is only seventy-nine thousand pounds."

"Impossible! It can not have been reduced. I shall require explanation; the very fullest," said the old banker, sternly.

The run still continued.

"We must appeal to our friends. I had many; surely some will help us now in our sore distress," said old Mr. Waldo.

But Mr. Waldo found little encouragement and less support. Already it was forced in on him, by the unanswerable logic of hard facts, that Meggitt was a scoundrel, a rascal; a dishonest rogue, who had played fast and loose with the bank.

"I should like to see him directly he returns," said Mr. Waldo, shortly.

But he asked in vain. Three, four, five o'clock came, but no Meggitt. What did arrive was far more damning evidence against the absent man.

The run on the bank had not been confined to specie payments. Several old clients had called or sent for securities deposited in the strong-room.

They were not to be found.

Once more Mr. Waldo sent post-haste to Mr. Faske, and put the affair in his hands. From Faske he learned everything; the truth about Leon Lantimêche the false marquis, Meggitt's treachery, and above all the wrongful sentence passed upon the old cashier.

Meggitt, meanwhile, had hurried home, laid hands on all property, jewels, bonds, and so forth, convertible into cash, and made up his mind to start that night for Havre *via* Southampton, intending to take the Saturday steamer of the French Transatlantic Company for New York.

But he lingered just to have one last dinner at his club. A basin of turtle soup, a brace of grouse, and a sweetbread curry, were set before him in turn, and he did ample justice to all; but he was not satisfied with the curry. He sent for the house-steward, and complained.

"There is too much turmeric in the curry-powder, you ought

to get another kind; see to it, will you? It is a favorite dish of mine, and I don't want to complain again next time I dine."

Next time! He had done with dinners at the Junior Belgrave for many a long year to come. His meals, in future, would be spare and simple enough—the bread of shame, moistened by the waters of vain regret.

But Meggitt had no idea that arrest was so near at hand. He left the club, fully confident that he had stolen a march upon his enemies, and that within a few hours he would be safe from pursuit.

It was a terrible shock to him to meet Fiske face to face as he came down the marble steps of the club.

"I want you," said the police officer; "I have a warrant."

"Where are you going to take me to?" asked Meggitt, surrendering on the spot, and in a complete state of collapse.

"Vine Street lock-up for to-night, and to-morrow the Mansion House and Clerkenwell."

CHAPTER XXXV.

NEWS FOR ALL.

ALTHOUGH the run on Waldo's was generally known, the city articles in the morning papers spoke with some caution on the subject. It was no secret, they said, that an old and much-respected banking-firm had experienced some difficulty in meeting its engagements, but there was every reason to hope that the storm would blow over.

The afternoon papers, however, told a different tale. Meggitt's arrest was announced, with a short account of his preliminary examination. No bank, however sound, could well survive the publication of such details, still less one like Waldo's, which was already tottering to its fall.

Early in the afternoon Waldo's put up their shutters. The bank had suspended payment with liabilities of upward of two hundred thousand pounds.

This was the news which was disseminated through the length and breadth of the land on the second morning.

It was read and freely commented upon everywhere. The Bonastres, now on a provincial tour, discussed it with their late breakfast at Leeds.

"Deuced lucky, Rina, that I got out when I did," said the hard-headed lessee of the Royal Roscius.

"And that Meggitt, what a thorough paced rascal!" added his wife. "But I always thought it."

Others thought so, too, including Lord Wingspur, who chuckled greatly over the news.

"They can't bully me any more, begad, because I owe them a few pounds."

"Are you in their debt, then?" he was asked.

"Yes; mortgages on the Scotch estates."

"You don't suppose because they smash you won't have to pay?"

"How do you mean? I don't understand. I never was good at business."

"Why, of course, the creditors of the bank will come down upon you to the uttermost farthing."

"The brutes!"—his lordship meant the Waldos, not the creditors—"to think that they should expose me to this. I shall lose the land I suppose?"

The last whom the news reached were those most concerned. Several days elapsed before authentic intelligence arrived at Dal-na-Muick.

Some one in the smoking-room took up a newspaper two or three days old—the papers came regularly, but no one read them much, they were not a literary lot at Dal-na-Muick—and in this paper was a reference to the recent failure at Waldo's bank.

It was pointed out to Horace Wingspur; he went and told his sisters, but neither of them would believe a word.

"Mother would have been sure to know," said Clara.

Mrs. Waldo's stormy interview with Meggitt had long since prepared her for some dire intelligence, but she hardly thought it would come so soon.

She hid her face in her hands when they told her the dire intelligence. Retribution, swift and overwhelming, had fallen upon her. Ruin, dire ruin, shame, beggary, disgrace, would be her portion now and for the future.

"What will become of us all?" she gasped.

There was a family council as to what should be done. Mrs. Waldo was for returning at once to Kew; she had some glimmering sense of good feeling left, and she felt that her proper place would be there, at her husband's side.

"I shall wire to Helena to-day, and act as your father wishes."

But Mr. Waldo was in no condition to send instructions to his

absent family. The answer that came from Helena was that he had had a paralytic seizure, and lay at death's door.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DAUNT'S REWARD.

THE day after Meggitt's arrest was a busy one for Daunt. Following Faske's advice he went first to Saville Row and had a long talk with Mr. Liljearth. Thence he went to the Home Office, and saw the same high personage that he had interviewed before.

"Well, I don't deny that you have a strong case, Sir Richard, but still many of your facts have got to be proved; what do you want us to do?"

"I think Mr. Surtees ought to be released conditionally."

"That's out of the question; a sentence of penal servitude can not be set aside in that easy fashion. But I tell you what I will do: the man shall be brought up to Millbank. He ought to be close at hand in case you want to consult him."

Daunt thanked the great personage and withdrew. Then he hastened to Victoria, and took the first train to Chatham.

"You bring good news," said Josephine, directly she saw him. He had gone straight to her.

"The very best."

She did not ask him to explain before they were alone, and then he would say nothing till he had taken her into his arms.

"At last, at last!" he cried, passionately, kissing her again.

"Richard, please, you must not; remember!" murmured Josephine, as she sought, vainly, to withdraw from his caresses.

"Our compact is ended almost. You are now my own; I have won you fairly, and on your own terms."

"Are you certain that you have succeeded, Richard? You are not claiming your reward"—she smiled at him through her tears—"too soon?"

"Your father will be released within a month; I can almost promise you that. Nothing can be settled finally till after Meggitt's trial. Meanwhile, Josephine, you must be preparing to welcome him home."

"Where am I to go?"

"Back to the old home, of course. I have arranged it all. The tenant will vacate at once, and you must go and keep house for

Bob until your father returns, and then—we will be married from there.”

Josephine could not speak—her heart was too full; but she found a few words at last, spoken in a soft low whisper as her head lay against his breast.

“Yes, Richard, if you will take me. But I am not worthy. You are too good, too—”

Daunt silenced her in the readiest way a lover can.

After many fond adieus Daunt tore himself away. Snatching a hurried dinner he traveled on to Dover, and took the night-mail to Paris.

Daunt paid an early visit to the Prefecture next day, and explained to M. Acmé the last service he required.

“Fanchette? Yes, she is here, we have kept our eye on her as you wished, and now you want her to speak out? Is that it, *mon cher* Sir Daunt? we may persuade her, I think,” and he touched a hand-bell. “Have this *mandat* taken to the Rue du Bac,” he said to his *huissier*. “I wish to see the person named in it at once—here.”

Presently Fanchette, smart and coquettish as ever, was ushered in.

She started at seeing Daunt seated there, and looked from him to the *chef*.

“There is nothing to fear, madame”—the chief consulted a paper in front of him—“Poirat, yes, Poirat. Your assistance is needed in a cause which will be heard in London shortly. The prisoners are Percy Meggitt and Joseph Devas, *alias* Leon Lantimèche.

“I know nothing; I shall say nothing,” replied Fanchette, doggedly.

“Pardon me. On further consideration I think you will.”

“I will pay you anything in reason to appear,” put in Daunt, hastily.

“A moment, monsieur. Justice is not to be bought. Madame Poirat will come forward out of pure good feeling, I think.”

Fanchette did not look much like it just then.

“At least, if Madame Poirat won’t, Leonie Fanchette Jocassee, *dit* La Felluse, *dit* Caramel, *dit* Patata, will do so, I feel sure.”

Fanchette turned very pale.

There was little doubt after that of her appearance as a witness at the trial.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE WEB UNRAVELED.

MEGGITT's trial caused great excitement in the city. There was a marked contrast between the two prisoners as they stood side by side in the dock. Meggitt was dressed with extreme care, in frock coat, satin tie, and kid gloves, as though he was going to a wedding and not to his doom. But his aspect was woe-begone and abject—he seemed overcome by the shame and disgrace of his position. Leon, on the contrary, although wearing the garb of the felon—a hideous patchwork of drab and yellow, with neglected beard and close-cropped hair—held himself erect, and looked around the court with a defiant air. His dark, evil eye rested for a moment on the judge, keenly scanning his impressive features, vainly striving to read upon them some forecast of his fate.

After all, Leon was better off than Meggitt. He was arraigned there as the lesser criminal—a partner in, but not, as he really was, the originator of Meggitt's guilt; joined with Meggitt in the conspiracy, for the more especial advantage and aggrandizement of the latter.

Meggitt, the trusted, esteemed, confidential *employé*, stood out as the chief culprit in the frauds and misappropriations now brought to light.

The case was strong against him, and looked very black from the first. It was skillfully and pertinently stated by the attorney-general, who prosecuted on behalf of the Crown. This attorney-general was no other than Sir Silas Standaloft, who had defended Mr. Surtees, and who had since entered Parliament and risen to a high office under a newly-appointed ministry.

Sir Silas licked his lips and went at Meggitt tooth and nail.

"I shall show and prove in evidence," said Sir Silas, having freely lubricated his lips, preparatory to a great effort, "I shall show how the prisoner, making use of information he had received, procured the appointment within the precincts of Mr. Waldo's house of a creature devoted to his own interests, who was employed as personal attendant to Mrs. Waldo, and having the run of the private apartments. This person was found for him by the other prisoner, Devas, between whom and Meggitt a close alliance had been formed. By the instrumentality of this woman—a clever

and unscrupulous Frenchwoman—a false key to the strong-room was obtained. She is here, and she will tell herself how it was done.”

At this statement a gleam of baleful light flashed from Leon’s dark eyes.

“Having thus obtained access, at will and secretly, to the strong-room, it was easy to abstract any number of securities and valuables. But at this point simple robbery was not their object. They were playing a far deeper game; they were conspiring to bring the whole resources of the bank under their control. For this purpose it was essential to get the cashier out of the way, the honest and unsuspecting superior, who would have soon detected and put an end to any foul play. This they accomplished in a cruel and unscrupulous manner, with a result well known to your lordship and to others in this court.

“I shall be able to show you how they smuggled into Mr. Surtees’s possession some of the stolen bonds, and thus gave strength and color to the grievous accusation under which the poor man succumbed; I will prove to you that Meggitt had access at will to the cashier’s drawers and boxes, that he had false keys to all of them—”

Sensation in court.

“That he abstracted from one of them an old contract for the purchase of certain Portuguese stock, a contract which Mr. Surtees naturally could not produce at his trial, and the existence of which he had, unfortunately, forgotten. By this means Mr. Surtees was prevented from proving that he had long possessed securities—similar to those stolen—of his own. It will be proved to your satisfaction that these bonds were also abstracted, and a part of the stolen bonds—those stolen from the strong-room—were substituted for them. In support of this I shall produce the contract of which I have spoken; the bonds which were Mr. Surtees’s property, and—mark this well—the balance of the stolen bonds. The whole of these damnatory and convincing proofs were found in the possession of one or other of the prisoners.”

Sir Silas here paused to give full effect to his words.

Then amidst breathless silence he continued:

“After these facts have been fully established, and I have not the slightest doubt that I shall do so, an act of tardy justice will, I trust, be done to the first, and, I think the chief, victim of these vile machinations. An innocent man, my lord and gentlemen of the jury—an innocent, a much-wronged and deeply suffering man

—cries aloud from the depths of the gloomy prison-cell to which the crafty knavery of these villains consigned him—he cries aloud, I say, for restitution, revindication, rehabilitation, and redress. Mercy and justice—pardon, apology and compensation—must be dealt out promptly, and without stint to that grievously ill-used man.”

Sir Silas wiped his eyes, blew his nose, licked his lips, and seemed as much affected as his hearers at this impassioned harangue.

Presently he went on:

“It is not difficult to trace the further proceedings of this precious pair. Fortune, or rather misfortune, favored them. A very lax control seems to have been exercised over the new cashier; one partner, now deceased, was a dilettante and a virtuoso, who had practically withdrawn from affairs. The other, through sickness, was unable to keep this Meggitt in his place; and it is impossible to withhold some sympathy from Mr. Waldo, whose neglect and overconfidence dated only from his own inability to attend closely to business. Thus Meggitt soon got his head. One of his first acts was to introduce to the bank, as a most eligible and valuable client, this friend and confederate, the man who, clothed in the garb of shame, stands there by his side; the man who, assuming a fictitious title and all the airs of a nobleman, was at that very moment a convict on ticket-of-leave.

“What follows is told in the books of the bank; they will be produced in court, and they will lay bare the vast and intricate frauds conceived by these consummate rogues, the boldness with which they were carried out, and all the clever shifts and artful contrivances by which they were concealed almost to the last. It will be shown you how the chief conspirator misappropriated and made away with the property of the bank, with its own funds, and with the securities intrusted to his care. Some of these were found in his possession, some in that of his confederate; others, to a large extent, have been sold to cover defalcations; and the brokers, through whom and by whom they were sold, will go into the witness-box and swear that they acted under instructions from Meggitt. It is not strange that the bank should break after being thus pillaged and plundered right and left; and that there should be at this moment somewhere, but entirely unaccounted for, a sum of nearly two hundred thousand pounds, which has passed out of the assets of the bank into the keeping of one or other or both these prisoners at the bar.”

It is not necessary to follow Sir Silas Standaloft further. The

learned counsel was tedious, though eloquent, and his speech lasted several hours. But when he sat down and his junior began to call the witnesses, it was felt that neither of the prisoners had the ghost of a chance.

Fanchette's evidence was especially damaging, although Leon's evil eye was upon her throughout. She spoke out openly, and confessed all she knew. She had come from Paris on purpose to take service with Mrs. Waldo. She had watched her opportunity, and entered Mr. Waldo's dressing-room one morning while he was at his bath, and had taken the impression of the key. This she had done more than once under the prisoner Leon, or Devas's instructions.

The judge's summing-up was clear for conviction, and the verdict of guilty came as a matter of course. In passing sentence he drew a distinction between the crimes of the two prisoners.

"You," he said, addressing Meggitt, "are the most culpable. Through you an innocent man has been suffering severe but unmerited punishment. Through your criminal weakness and want of principle a respectable old firm has been pulled down, and numbers of too-confiding people robbed and ruined. I feel it my duty to mark my sense of the enormity of the crimes you have committed by an exemplary sentence; and I do therefore direct that you be kept in penal servitude for twenty years."

A slight tremor passed over Meggitt's face, and a faint shriek was heard in the gallery. It was from a lady closely veiled—Mrs. Waldo.

"As for you, Devas, an habitual criminal, who know already the interior of many jails, imprisonment has, I fear, no terrors. But it was you, I believe, who originated this vast scheme of fraud, and it was to your baleful influence that your miserable confederate succumbed. I shall therefore treat you to your deserts, and now sentence you to penal servitude for fifteen years."

Thus ended the second great case in which Waldo's bank was concerned.

But there was a sequel to the trial.

Later that same day a neat brougham drove up to the door of Millbank Prison. Sir Richard Daunt alighted from it; he was admitted, and ushered into the presence of the governor, to whom he handed a letter from the Home Secretary.

"I was allowed to bring you this personally," said Daunt, "so as to expedite Mr. Surtees's release. May I hope that no time will be lost in setting him free?"

"It will merely be necessary for him to change. We have 'liberty' clothing always ready, and then he can go with you."

In less than half an hour Mr. Surtees, greatly agitated by the unexpected good news, appeared, and, taking Sir Richard's arm, walked out from the prison a free man.

Josephine, who was in the brougham, waiting, fell into her father's arms, and the two were driven rapidly home to Chiswick.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CONCLUSION.

A FEW words as to the most prominent personages in this veracious narrative.

Josephine soon consented to make Daunt happy. Why should they wait? asked Sir Richard, pertinently. They had everything they could want; loving hearts too long separated; ample means; and Mr. Surtees was there to bless and approve of their union.

The marriage was a very quiet one. Helena Waldo consented to act as bride-maid, and Bob Surtees was Daunt's best man.

"You are well worthy of each other," said old Mr. Surtees, as he saw their hands joined. "She has ever been the most devoted daughter, and you have proved yourself the best of sons."

Secure in the affectionate ministrations of his children, Mr. Surtees passed the autumn of his days in calm contentment. The storms and trials which had sorely oppressed him were forgotten, and he could pity and forgive the authors of his troubles.

The waters closed over the Waldos. Mr. Waldo was made a bankrupt, and eventually paid fifteen pence in the pound. The family went to live at Brighton in Ditchling Rise. Then after her poor old father's death, Bob Surtees came for Helena, and married her in spite of Mrs. Waldo's persistent objections to the match. Bob has stuck to the theatrical profession, and now manages one of Mr. Bonastre's traveling companies. Both Clara and Augusta married in the long run, one a commercial traveler, the other a dashing sergeant of Light Dragoons.

Captain Wingspur went to India with an infantry regiment, and died there, a drunkard and in debt, long before the title fell in. Lord Wingspur proved very long-lived; and he is still, but with greatly reduced means, a chief ornament of a French watering-place on the Brittany coast.

Both Meggitt and Devas, *alias* Leon Lantimêche, after their sentence passed out of sight. The last heard of the former was at Dartmoor, where he was busily engaged with a few hundreds of his own sort reclaiming waste lands on which nothing would grow.

As for Devas, *alias* Leon Lantimêche, he came to an untimely end. His fate was recorded in the following brief lines from the Weymouth correspondent of a daily paper:

“FRACAS AT PORTLAND.—Yesterday, as a party of convicts were working on the Verne, one of them, who owed his warder a grudge for some fancied wrong, made a murderous assault on him with a cold chisel. The warder defended himself with his sword, and cut his assailant down. The convict, who was named Joseph Devas, was mortally wounded and has since expired.”

With Leon died the secret of his ill-gotten wealth. The place where it is concealed has never transpired, and whether it will some day unexpectedly enrich a treasure-hunter, or whether it will pass unclaimed into the assets of the bank where it is lodged, at home or abroad, the future alone can tell.

THE END.

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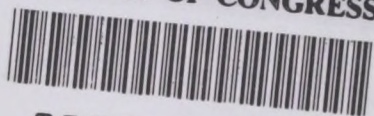
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